

# DRAFT

## COLUMBIA COUNTY FIRE SERVICES STUDY UPDATED MAY 2003

Your comments and opinions are requested on any and all aspects of this “draft” fire study. Please use the first section of the form on page 7-1 for general comments and the second section for page-specific comments. If you wish to receive a response, then include your name, address and e-mail address at the end of the comments form, and a response will be forthcoming. Verbal comments can be received Monday through Friday 8 AM - 5 PM by calling 868-3375, and e-mails may be sent to [information@co.columbia.ga.us](mailto:information@co.columbia.ga.us). Written responses may be mailed to the Emergency Services Division, P.O. Box 498, Evans, GA 30809 or faxed to 868-3343.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The first *Columbia County Fire Services Study* was initiated in August 1996 and was completed in November 1997. The 16 month study was jointly written by Steve Szablewski, County Administrator, and Chief John Tomberlin, President of the County's Fire Chiefs Association. The Fire Chiefs or their representatives from all the fire departments in the County assisted in preparing the study along with key County staff. The purpose of the study was to examine the existing fire services, to find ways to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of collecting funds, and to make the best use of funds for fire protection.

The 1997 study concluded with 13 findings and recommendations. A summary of the recommendation and their current status is discussed in the *Existing Fire Services* section of this study. Unfortunately, only a few of the recommendations have been accomplished.

### **Updated Study**

The initial discussion of revising the 1997 *Columbia County Fire Services Study* took place at the County's Planning Advance with the Division Directors and Board of Commissioners in November 2002. Commissioners asked County staff to complete the updated fire study by the spring of 2003 so that it could be reviewed as part of the County's FY 2003/04 budget. To meet the short deadline, the Emergency Services Division was asked to prepare a list of questions that was distributed to all fire departments in the County.

In outlining the goals for Columbia County in January 2003, Chairman Cross emphasized the need to improve safety and security in the County. Specific mention was made about ensuring that the Sheriff's Office, Emergency Management Agency, and fire departments have the training and equipment they need to perform their vital roles in protecting this community. A summary of the Board of Commissioners goals was distributed to every household in the County in a *Briefing 2003* report in February of this year.

A meeting between Chairman Cross, County staff, and the fire chiefs was held on January 29, 2003. The questionnaire prepared by the County was completed by the chiefs and complied by the Emergency Services Division in March of this year. The first draft of the *Columbia County Fire Services Study Update* was completed by County staff in May 2003. Since it is a draft, it needs review and comment from Commissioners, fire chiefs, and citizens before it is put in final form.

The responsibility for preparing the report was assigned to Pam Tucker, Emergency Services Director, and Steve Szablewski, County Administrator and co-author of the 1997 study. Key assistance was received from the following individuals:

Todd Glover, Management Services Director  
Mary Blalock, Financial Services  
Roy Rogers, County Fire Marshal  
Bill Clayton, Water Services Director  
Clay Whittle, Sheriff

Marilyn Heuer, Report Editor  
Lewis Foster, Information Technology Manager  
Lee Hartley, Planning Services Mapper  
Tim Young, Planner  
Doug Batchelor, County Attorney

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After the draft study was prepared and internally reviewed by County staff and officials, a work session was held with fire and municipal officials that could be interested in this study. The official public release date for the study was scheduled for the Community and Emergency Services Committee meeting on May 12, 2003. Following a review and comment period of 30 days, the final report will be issued in July 2003.

The purpose of the *Columbia County Fire Services Study Update* is similar to the 1997 study – to determine the best method to raise and use funds for fire protection services in Columbia County.

To accomplish the study objective, this report is divided into the following sections:

- **Background Information on Fire Services**

This section was not in the 1997 study, but it is felt that information on County growth, comparisons with similar sized counties in Georgia, how other departments are organized and funded, and the legal aspects of fire protection services in Georgia would be helpful in evaluating our current situation in Columbia County.

- **Existing Fire Services in Columbia County**

This section closely follows the format used in 1997. Items added include information on communications, summary of fire calls, board of directors of fire departments, water services, County fire marshal, forestry unit, and accomplishments since 1997 study.

- **Comparison of Subscription and Tax Alternatives**

This section follows the 1997 format but focuses on the alternatives of using a uniform property tax millage rate for the entire County instead of funding fire protection through a subscription system. The millage rate required to fund fire services is outlined along with cost comparisons for various valued residential properties between subscription and property tax alternatives.

- **Proposed Use of Funds**

This section was added to this report since the previous study did not mention how funds would be used if the County set a millage rate for fire protection. Topics discussed include possible distribution of funds by fire district, distribution of tax funds based on budget recommendations for a county-wide service, and budget alternatives for existing districts, partially-consolidated districts, and a fully-consolidated district.

- **Findings and Recommendations**

As in the 1997 study, conclusions are reached and recommendations are made based on the information received from the fire departments. Since this section was drafted by County staff, others in different roles may have different opinions. Topics discussed include a review of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) associated with the current fire protection system, findings and recommendations, proposed timelines for implementing recommendations, and an illustrated example of how a property tax for operations and a SPLOST for capital could be implemented for fire service in Columbia County.

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Finally, it is hoped that this study will trigger open and honest debate on the best methods to collect and use funds for Columbia County fire protection.

## **Summary**

Salient points raised in the study include the following:

### **1. Introduction**

- Most of the recommendations presented in the 1997 Fire Study have not been accomplished.
- The Board of Commissioners emphasized the need to improve safety and security in the County in preparing goals for 2003.
- The purpose of the Fire Study Update is to determine the best method to raise and use funds for fire protection services in Columbia County.
- It is hoped that the Fire Study Update will facilitate discussion on improving fire services.

### **2. Background Information**

- Columbia County has grown 10 fold since 1950 from 9,525 to 95,000 in 2002.
- The majority of full-time career fire departments are in major urban and suburban areas.
- Volunteer departments in Georgia are found in less densely populated rural areas where funding for full-time agencies is not feasible.
- Combination departments consisting of both full-time paid firefighters and volunteers for nights and emergencies provides the lowest cost option in providing 24/7 fire protection.
- Taxes can be deducted from income tax returns while subscription fees cannot.
- “Fires aren’t put out with water, they’re put out with money.”
- The local service with the highest percentage of trust by adults was their own fire service.
- Of the 18 Georgia counties with a population of 76,000 or more, 11 have a paid county fire department, 6 have a combination fire department with paid and volunteer firefighters, and only 1 government – Columbia County – did not have a county-funded department of any type.
- Using the number of firefighters per 1000 population in benchmark counties, Columbia County would require a combination department with 96 full-time and 40 volunteers or a total of 136 firefighters.
- The establishment and operation of a county fire service is clearly authorized by the constitution of the State of Georgia and by legislative enactment.

### **3. Existing Services**

- Martinez and Grovetown fire departments are currently the only five services that provide 24-hour paid, on-duty personnel.
- Martinez and Grovetown divide the vehicle extrication services for Columbia County.

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- Columbia County Water Services Division has the best training and equipment for responding to Hazmat incidents.
- Appling, Leah, and Winfield are comprised of an all-volunteer force that limits response to service calls during the normal “workday” hours.
- Martinez has a class 4 ISO rating while Grovetown maintains a Class 5 rating. Harlem, Appling, and Leah have ratings from 6 to 9 depending on distance from a fire station. Winfield has a rating of 7 to 9 also depending on distance from a station.
- Martinez has 56 paid firefighters and 75 volunteers while Grovetown has 18 paid and 18 volunteers. Harlem has 1 paid and 25 volunteers. Appling, Leah, and Winfield have about 25 volunteers each and no full-time paid firefighters.
- Columbia County Water Services Division provides the majority of water services to the unincorporated area of the County.
- Columbia County provides a full-time fire marshal to review plans and specifications for code compliance in all of the county.
- Only 5 of the 13 recommendations in the 1997 Fire Study have been acted on by County and fire officials.

#### **4. Comparison of Subscription and Tax Alternatives**

- Approximately 84.9% of the potential subscription revenue is collected and amounts to \$3,353,082 in 2002.
- A 1.62 mill fire rate would provide \$4,017,145 while a 2.00 mill rate would raise \$4,959,438.
- The property tax alternative is a lower cost option for homes in all districts using a 1.62 mill rate when compared to current subscription rates. Savings for property valued at \$127,485 would range from \$6.95 in Appling and Winfield to \$37.72 in Martinez.
- Savings for a home valued at \$170,793 range from \$29.31 to \$74.20 when the property tax alternative is compared to existing subscription fee rates.
- Vacant land currently is not billed for fire subscription fees but would be taxed under the property tax alternative.

#### **5. Proposed Use of Property Tax Funds**

- The property tax alternative of 2.00 mills would generate \$1,017,084 in additional revenue than the current subscription system.
- If SPLOST funds were dedicated to capital fire protection needs, the millage requirement could be reduced .38 mills from 2.00 mills to 1.62 mills.
- Contracts with exiting fire departments using the property tax collection system would permit Grovetown and Martinez to provide additional 24/7 coverage estimated at \$354,000 per year. Increases in Harlem, Appling, Leah, and Winfield would not be enough to provide 24/7 staffing.
- Through consolidation of Grovetown-Harlem and Appling-Leah-Winfield departments, funds would be available to have one 24/7 station added to each consolidated district.

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- Contracting with a single entity for fire service would make the best use of resources, offer the greatest flexibility, streamline command and control, unify training, and simplify mutual aid.
- Various alternatives need to be discussed by County policy makers, municipal leaders, fire officials, and citizens.

## 6. Findings and Recommendations

- Strengths of the current subscription system is that it is low cost and voluntary.
- Weaknesses with the subscription system are difficulty in fee collection, inability to get federal tax deduction, failure to provide 24/7 staffed stations county-wide, and payment of state and local sales taxes for capital items.
- The major opportunity is to develop a unified fire service system funded through property tax for operations and SPLOST for capital needs.
- Threats include limited all-hazards response to chemical incidents, bombings and terrorism incidents, and a lack of comprehensive training.
- Findings and recommendations deal with the following topics:
  - Recognition of the service provided by current fire departments.
  - Partially- or fully-consolidated departments.
  - Establish a combination department with enough full-time firefighters to provide 24/7 coverage county-wide. Full-time staff supplemented by volunteers to keep costs low.
  - Property tax is more cost-effective than subscription system.
  - Utilize SPLOST for capital requirements.
  - There is a strong legal basis for establishing and operating a county-wide fire protection system.
  - A Fire Master Plan is needed to help guide future decisions.
  - A central training facility for firefighters and related public safety operations is needed.
  - Contracts and/or intergovernmental agreements could be used to improve fire service operations
  - Oversight of fire service operations can be provided by the existing Emergency Services Committee. If contracts or intergovernmental agreements are used, the Emergency Services Division can manage the contracts, If a County fire department is created, a new division would have to be created and assigned to the Community and Emergency Services Committee.
  - Timelines with both compressed and expanded schedules are outlined.
  - An illustrated example is provided showing how a property tax and SPLOST funded fire services could be implemented.
  - Presenting fire capital needs on a SPLOST referendum in July 2004 that includes a general obligation bond issue for immediate capital needs offers the best alternative for providing improved fire service at the least cost to home owners.

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## 2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON FIRE SERVICES

### **Population**

Columbia County has grown from 9,525 in 1950 to 95,000 in 2002 according to U.S. Census Bureau information. The County's population is projected to grow to more than 164,000 by 2020 according to the County's Growth Management Plan. Rapid growth has transformed Columbia County from a rural neighbor of Augusta to the major suburban county in the second largest metropolitan area in Georgia.

### **Fire Protection**

According to the *Handbook for Georgia County Commissioners*, there are 671 fire departments in Georgia. Of these departments, 172 or 26 percent are considered career agencies since they employ full-time employees. The majority of career departments are found in the major urban and suburban areas of the state. Volunteer departments primarily are found in less densely populated rural areas where funding for career agencies is not feasible.

The *Handbook for Georgia County Commissioners* further states that:

#### **Basic Mission**

The basic mission of fire departments is to save lives and protect property. Today's fire department plays a significantly different role in the community than its predecessor did 30 years ago. The modern fire department reflects an all-hazards response organization for multiple emergency events that may include emergency responses to medical calls such as heart attacks and other illnesses, extrication of victims from automobile accidents, rescues and responses to hazardous incidents such as cave-ins and downed power lines, emergency management activities, and disaster response. By law, fire departments have primary responsibility for first-response to chemical incidents with toxic potentials. Law enforcement-related activities often require the intervention of firefighters including responses to bombings and other terrorism incidents.

To be legally organized, a county fire department—whether comprising full-time, paid staff or volunteers—must

- Be established in accordance with the provisions of National Fire Protection Association Standard 1201-1984
- Be capable of providing fire protection 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- Be responsible for a defined area of operations depicted on a map located at the fire station
- Be staffed with a sufficient number of qualified firefighters who are full-time or part-time workers or volunteers who have successfully completed an approved basic fire-fighting course conducted by or through the Georgia Fire Academy

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- Possess certain minimum equipment and protective clothing
- Maintain sufficient insurance coverage on all members to cover injuries sustained when answering fire calls or other emergencies and when participating in scheduled training sessions.

In addition, the county fire department must comply with the minimum standards established by the Georgia Firefighter Standards and Training Council. Failure to meet and maintain these requirements may result in the loss of a fire department's certification.

Each department should have the following:

- Master planning
- Adequate equipment and facilities
- Effective communications
- Employment and training standards
- Ongoing training
- A fire prevention program
- Knowledge of the fire-rating process
- Sufficient water supply

### **Master Planning**

A fire master plan can be used to improve fire department efficiency. All communities should have a master plan for fire protection that identifies the requirements (resources) essential for an effective fire protection program. Master planning should at minimum include efforts that identify the number and location of current and needed facilities and equipment, minimum water system requirements to provide for effective extinguishing capability and adequate communications necessary for conducting emergency operations. The plan should be revised regularly to reflect changes in the department's scope or mission.

### **Adequate Equipment and Facilities**

Fire departments need various types of equipment:

- Vehicles to transport firefighters to fires
- Vehicles to transport and pump water to fires
- Fire-fighting equipment on the vehicles such as pumps, ladders, hose, self-contained breathing apparatus, and fire extinguishers
- Protective clothing such as coats, helmets, and boots

Fire stations should be strategically deployed throughout the community to provide for effective response times to emergencies. The primary purpose of strategic station distribution is to minimize response times and enable firefighters to suppress reported fires in a time-critical manner prior to flashover (i.e., when all flammable contents within a structure spontaneously ignite). From a medical perspective, response time should be structured to allow personnel to intervene and provide life-saving procedures such as

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CPR during the first four to six minutes of an emergency event. Sufficient space should be provided to allow business to be conducted normally as well as allow personnel to be able to function on around-the-clock schedules.

## **Employment and Training Standards**

Fire departments are required to adhere to the statutory training requirements identified by the Georgia Firefighters Standards and Training Council. The standards set forth by this agency are limited to career employees (i.e., full-time rather than volunteer) and include initial training for new firefighters and annual refresher or in-service training of 120 hours. Failure to comply with these mandates will result in a firefighter losing his/her certification and ability to be gainfully employed. As legally organized agencies, fire departments are responsible for providing the required training to maintain individual certification.

The initial training requirements for a career (i.e., full-time, paid) firefighter are based on the qualifications contained in the National Fire Protection Association Standard 1001. Employees who receive this initial training must successfully complete testing by the Firefighters Standards and Training Council in order to receive their certification. In addition to fulfilling the qualifications necessary to be a full-time firefighter, a person employed or certified as a firefighter must be fingerprinted and a search must be made of local, state, and national fingerprint files to disclose any criminal record.

Training requirements for volunteer firefighters differ from those for career personnel and consist of a minimum requirement of 40 hours of initial training. Individuals pursuing this level of training, which is provided through the Georgia Fire Academy, are required to complete Module I of firefighter instruction to be considered a Basic Firefighter.

## **ISO Fire-Rating Process**

Every fire chief should understand how fire departments are evaluated for insurance purposes by the Insurance Services Office (ISO). Fire personnel should understand the basis for the department's existing rating and what is required to improve it.

For the purpose of establishing homeowners and fire insurance rates, each fire department is rated or classified by ISO. In making an evaluation, ISO uses the *Fire Suppression Rating Schedule* as a guide for evaluating fire suppression capabilities. It places departments in one of 10 classes with Class 1 rating being the highest and Class 10 the lowest. To meet the minimum level of protection recognized by ISO, a fire department must have at least a Class 9 rating.

In evaluating fire departments, ISO representatives measure three principal features of the fire suppression system: fire alarms, fire department, and water supply. In each of these three areas, ISO inspectors assign credits based on the quality of performance. The final rating depends on percentage of total possible credits received.

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## Water Supply

Fire suppression efforts and their success depend on an adequate supply of water for extinguishing fires. Flow and pressure required for industrial and commercial fires are typically greater than those required for residential fires. In determining water system design for pressurized systems, community leaders should take into consideration required fire flows and potable demands. Size and distribution of water mains should be adequate for required fire flows and pressures. A well-maintained system of fire hydrants is integral to an effective water system design for fire-protection purposes. An ongoing program of fire hydrant inspection and maintenance helps to ensure adequate water pressure.

In the absence of pressurized systems, communities should establish alternative water-delivery capabilities including the ability to shuttle or haul water from static water sources such as ponds, streams, lakes, or cisterns. Dry or draft hydrants can facilitate and improve the time required for conducting these activities.

## Kinds of Fire Departments

Although the basic reason for having a fire department is universal, local circumstances influence how the mission is fulfilled. There are many types of fire departments – military and federal - which do not pertain to the needs of Columbia County. However, state, local government fire departments, county fire departments, intergovernmental fire protection, and private sector fire protection organizations are worth study and the following is a brief review of each kind. Information from this part of the report was obtained from *Managing Fire and Rescue Services* published by the International City/County Management Association.

### 1. State Fire Departments

Such departments are usually a response to fire risks that extend beyond the jurisdiction of local government. These risks are usually related to forests and natural fuels that would pose serious threats to life, property, and the economy of the region if fires occurred and were not controlled. The Georgia Forestry Unit in Columbia County on Wrightsboro Road is an example of a State Department that is also supplemented by County funds.

### 2. Local Government

- Greatest number of personnel and amount of equipment
- Provide fire protection services, some level of EMS, and rescue capabilities
- Under General Fund with annual budget prepared by fire chief and approved by elected officials
- More than 85% of budget is for salaries and employee benefits
- Some fire departments use volunteers with the municipality/county paying for equipment, supplies, and structural facilities - local fund raising is used to help defray cost of new equipment. The Cities of Grovetown and Harlem are examples of local fire departments.

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### 3. County

- Overall funding and policy direction by elected officials
- Usually evolves due to the need of more than one local fire department
- Services similar to those provided by local fire departments

Currently, there is not a County Fire Department in Columbia County.

### 4. Intergovernmental

- Two or more jurisdictions form a separate governmental authority or fire district
- Provisions for funding, decision making, and overall control while pooling resources and personnel to eliminate duplication
- Funding from a portion of local taxes, special fees, or assessment
- A local governing body may contract for fire protection with another agency (e.g., one locality contracts with another for fire protection)

There are no examples of intergovernmental departments currently in Columbia County. If the County collected funds through a dedicated millage rate for fire protection and contracted with either one or both of our municipalities, it would be an example of an intergovernmental department.

### 5. Private Sector Organizations

- Services are delivered by employees of a company rather than a local government
- Company is accountable to elected officials for quality and efficiency of service delivery (e.g., our current ambulance services)
- Local government fire departments themselves can enter into limited partnerships with private firms

## **Organizational Structures of Fire Departments**

While the kind of fire department is a function of the entity that controls the department's overall funding and policy direction, the organizational structure of a department is a function of the employment relationship between the firefighters and the parent organization.

### 1. Volunteer Departments

- Most numerous in U.S. - protects 80% of land area in U.S.
- Most serve rural areas with less than 2,500 people
- Difficulties - getting volunteers and volunteers commuting long distances to employment
- Many require volunteers to sleep at fire station
- Volunteers are very committed to community

### 2. Career Departments

- Protect 60% of the nation's population in more densely populated areas
- Fully paid and receive employee benefits

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### 3. Combination Departments

- Evolved from communities needing daytime staffing but had volunteers for night
- Paid firefighters provide full-time staffing and volunteers augment staff at emergencies
- Important need for regular, joint training and drilling

Martinez is an example of a combination fire department.

### 4. Public Safety Consolidations

- Most common in smaller communities
- Police officers are cross-trained in basic firefighting techniques and carry personal protective gear in their vehicles
- Day-to-day fire responsibilities (i.e., public education, equipment and station maintenance, and administrative functions) are carried out by fire department
- Although the public safety concept is attractive from the efficiency point-of-view, it is usually controversial because law enforcement and fire protections are often viewed as two distinct disciplines

Grovetown employs a public safety structure for its police and fire services.

Consolidations work best in places where previously separate fire and EMS departments have merged. Five forms of consolidation - with "functional" the most common:

- *Administrative* - both departments maintain separate operations but administrative functions are combined
- *Functional* - departments may or may not be administratively consolidated but some operational functions (e.g., dispatch) are combined
- *Area* - joint operations in certain areas (e.g., residential) and separate operation in areas of with higher demand (e.g., downtown)
- *Partial* - fire and police departments are administratively consolidated and most operations are integrated
- *Full* - all administrative and operational functions are integrated into a single department of public safety

Some type of consolidation is possible in Columbia County between the Martinez, a combination department, and the strictly volunteer departments such as Appling, Leah, and Winfield.

### Funding of Fire Departments

Fiscal management focuses on information for decision making to include: budgeting, full costing, monitoring and reporting, managing financial information, managing the financial risks and exposures of the fire services organization, managing assets, and examining funding mechanisms and potential sources of revenue. The following are types of funding mechanisms that could be considered by Columbia County:

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1. Taxes
  - Generated locally through property, sales, income, and/or transient taxes
  - Can be deducted from individual/business income taxes
  - Nearly 100% collection
2. Benefits Assessment Charges
  - Charges for services based on the estimated benefits the users are expected to derive from those services
  - Administrated somewhat like property taxes, these charges factor in not only the size and type of property but also the “benefits” of being close to fire stations (e.g., reduced insurance, etc.)
  - Charges for fire protection more equitable
3. Fees
  - Fees range from small revenue producers to more lucrative ones:
    - Permit fees for new construction, special events, and performance of hazardous activities (e.g., fireworks displays)
    - Fee charged for emergency medical care
4. Contract
  - Fire departments contract out services to neighboring jurisdictions or for special events
5. Subscriptions
  - Often subscribers can recover fixed fees from homeowners insurance carriers
  - When nonsubscribers need service, they must pay the full amount of the response cost
6. Development impact fees
  - New developments can be required to pay for their impact on capital expenditures (e.g., building and equipping new fire stations)
7. Private sector sources
  - Being able to accept private donations by establishing nonprofit foundations
  - Endless variety of fundraising activities

The opening statement in the 1997 study was:

***...FIRES AREN'T PUT OUT WITH WATER, THEY'RE PUT OUT WITH MONEY....  
WHETHER A DEPARTMENT PAYS ITS PERSONNEL OR NOT, WHETHER ITS FUNDING  
COMES FROM LOCAL TAXES OR FROM PANCAKE BREAKFASTS, MONEY IS AN  
INDISPENSABLE RESOURCE FOR FIRE SUPPRESSION, FIRE PREVENTION, EMS,  
HAZMAT AND ANYTHING ELSE A DEPARTMENT MIGHT INCLUDE AMONG ITS  
REASONS FOR EXISTENCE.***

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This statement contained in *Fire Services Today: Managing a Changing Role and Mission* Dramatically points out that money is the key resource for operating a fire department. Money for fire services comes from citizens and businesses in Columbia County. How to raise and make the best use of this money is the purpose of this study.

## **Role in the Community**

In 1997, a national poll studied the relative levels of trust the public accorded various community services and institutions. The institution that the highest percentage of adults trusted “a lot” was their own fire department. With a rating of 78 percent, fire departments ranked 32 points ahead of the next highest entity. The ranking was only re-enforced with the events surrounding September 11, 2001. This information was obtained from *Managing Fire and Rescue Services* published by the International City/County Management Association

Firefighters are increasingly called to assist in other emergencies as well. In the public’s mind, promptness and reliability; a customer service attitude; crews that are physically capable, trained, disciplined, and well equipped characterize the professional fire and rescue department and underlie its status in most communities as the response resource of first and last resort.

## **Comparison of Fire Services in Benchmark Counties**

Illustration 2.A outlines how other counties in Georgia with a population of 76,000 or more in 2000 provide fire protection. Of the 18 counties surveyed, 11 reported having a paid county fire department, 6 had a combination county fire department (i.e., mixture of paid and volunteer firefighters), and only 1 government, Columbia County, did not have a county-funded department of any type.

Illustration 2.B shows information on ISO ratings, number of full-time personnel and volunteers, number of stations, and budget information for six counties that responded to our request for information. Bartow, Coweta, and Fayette counties utilize a combination county fire department with both paid and volunteer firefighters. Douglas, Hall, and Henry counties have paid, full-time firefighters.

The average number of firefighters (both full-time paid and volunteer) per 1000 population is 1.73. Utilizing this multiplier, Columbia County would require up to 154 firefighters based on its 2000 population of 89,000. If the combination fire department approach is utilized, approximately 1.08 full-time firefighters per 1000 population or 96 would be required. Volunteers would number 40 based on a multiplier of .45 per 1000. The combination alternative would require a total of 96 full-time and 40 volunteers or a total of 136.

The six counties surveyed averaged 11.66 county fire stations to provide service to their jurisdiction. This number could be misleading since some cities provide fire services and may not be included in this number.

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## GEORGIA FIRE DEPARTMENT STAFFING STATUS SURVEY OF COUNTIES WITH 76,000 OR MORE POPULATION

Illustration 2.A

COUNTY/ 2000 POPULATION	PAID	VOLUNTEER	COMBINATION
Athens-Clark Population 101,489	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Augusta-Richmond Population 199,775	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Bartow Population 76,019	N/A	N/A	<b>1 fire department</b>
Bibb Population 153,887	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Chatham Population 232,048	N/A	N/A	<b>2 fire departments</b>
Cherokee Population 141,903	N/A	N/A	<b>1 fire department</b>
Clayton Population 236,517	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Cobb Population 607,751	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Columbia County Population 89,288	N/A	<b>4 subscription fire departments</b>	<b>2 subscription fire departme nts</b>
Coweta Population 89,215	N/A	N/A	<b>1 fire department</b>
Douglas Population 92,174	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Fayette Population 91,263	N/A	N/A	<b>1 fire department</b>
Fulton Population 816,006	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Gwinnett Population 588,448	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Hall Population 139,277	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Henry Population 119,341	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Houston Population 110,765	N/A	N/A	<b>1 fire department</b>
Muscogee Population 186,291	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A

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Personnel budgets averaged \$70,000 per 1000 population for all counties surveyed. Combinations averaged \$46,700 per 1000 population since they utilized volunteers. With Columbia County's population of 89,000 in 2000, a combination department would required up to \$4,156,300 for personnel to service the entire county.

Operating expenses averaged \$1.1 million per county, while capital expenditures averaged an additional \$1.2 million per year. The utilization of future SPLOST funds for needed stations and equipment could assist in keeping down requirements for property tax revenues if the Commissioners decide to proceed with that alternative. Budget options will be discussed in more detail in the *Proposed Use of Funds* section of this report.

The value of one mill in Columbia County is \$2,479,719. If this amount was divided into the budget of Coweta County with a population of 89,215 and a combination department with 88 full-time and 30 volunteers, the millage rate required would be 2.42 for their \$6,008,831 budget. If capital of \$1,253,000 was paid out of SPLOST, about 1.92 mills would be required for personnel and operations.

Using Bartow County budget numbers, \$4.2 million in personnel, operations, and capital would require a millage rate in Columbia County of 1.69 mills. If SPLOST covered capital requirements, 1.41 mills would be required for personnel and operations.

### **Legal Aspects of Fire Protection Services**

#### **Constitutional and Statutory Authority to Provide Fire Protection Services**

The establishment and operation of a County Fire Department is clearly authorized by the Constitution of the State of Georgia (the "Constitution") and by legislative enactment.

The Home Rule portion of the Constitution (Article 9, Section 2, Paragraph 1) provides that the governing authority of each County has the power to adopt reasonable ordinances and resolutions that relate to County property, affairs and local government. Article 9, Section 2, Paragraph 3(a) specifically states "In addition to and supplementary of all powers possessed by or conferred upon any county, municipality or combination thereof, any county, municipality or any combination thereof may exercise the following powers and provide the following services: (1) police and fire protection..." Section 25-3-1 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated ("O.C.G.A.") states "Any fire department of a county, municipality or other political subdivision and any chartered fire department shall have the authority to...(7) Perform all such services of a fire department as may be provided by law or which necessarily appertain thereto." Further, Section 25-3-4 O.C.G.A. provides "the governing body of each county, municipality or other political subdivision of the state shall have the power to enact such ordinances, regulations, or fire and life safety codes as may be necessary to carry out this article."

#### **Contracting with Other Entities to Provide Fire Protection Service**

The Supreme Court of Georgia has specifically authorized contracts to provide fire protection, stating in Smith v. Board of Commissioners of Roads and Revenues, 259 S.E.2d 74, 77 (1979)

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“In particular, counties are authorized to enter contracts to provide fire protection even though that particular contractual power is not expressly conferred.”

Since the authority for the county to provide fire protection service is evident, consideration must be given to the operational and procedural steps required to implement this service within Columbia County. From the operational standpoint, the County may elect to contract for fire protection services with one or more of the existing fire departments identified in Resolution No. 03-324R adopted by the Board of Commissioners on March 18, 2003.

Section 25-3-5 O.C.G.A. states in pertinent part “Nothing within this Article shall be construed so as to permit a municipal fire department to operate in the unincorporated area of a county except by written or oral contract with the county.” Thus, the General Assembly has expressed its intention that there should not be a duplication of fire protection services and that contractual arrangements among fire protection service providers are permitted. Further, Article 9, Section 3, Paragraph 1 of the Constitution authorizes intergovernmental contracts among counties and any other public agency, public operation or public authority for the provision of joint services.

### Authority for Creation of Fire Protection Districts

The procedure for creation of a county fire protection district is straightforward. Article 9, Section 2, Paragraph 6 of the Constitution states:

“As hereinafter provided in this Paragraph, special districts may be created for the provision of local government services within such districts; and fees, assessments, and taxes may be levied and collected within such districts to pay, wholly or partially, the cost of providing such services therein and to construct and maintain facilities therefore. Such special districts may be created and fees, assessments, or taxes may be levied and collected therein by any one or more of the following methods:

- (a) By general law which directly creates the districts.
- (b) By general law which requires the creation of districts under conditions specified by such general law.
- (c) By municipal or county ordinance or resolution, except that no such ordinance or resolution may supercede a law enacted by the General Assembly pursuant to subparagraphs (a) or (b) of this Paragraph.”

Subsection (c) establishes that the adoption of a resolution or ordinance by the County Board will suffice to create the district, identify the services to be provided and may provide for the taxes necessary to pay for the cost of the services throughout the County. Note that the ordinance or resolution is, however, subject to amendment or repeal by the citizens of the county pursuant to the procedures established in Article 9, Section 2, Paragraph 1(b)(2) of the Constitution.

# GEORGIA FIRE DEPARTMENT STAFFING STATUS SURVEY

## COUNTY ONLY

### Illustration 2.A

COUNTY/ 2000 POPULATION	PAID	VOLUNTEER	COMBINATION
Athens-Clark Population 101,489	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Augusta-Richmond Population 199,775	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Bartow Population 76,019	N/A	N/A	<b>1 fire department</b>
Bibb Population 153,887	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Chatham Population 232,048	N/A	N/A	<b>2 fire departments</b>
Cherokee Population 141,903	N/A	N/A	<b>1 fire department</b>
Clayton Population 236,517	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Cobb Population 607,751	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Columbia County Population 89,288	N/A	<b>4 subscription fire departments</b>	<b>2 subscription fire departments</b>
Coweta Population 89,215	N/A	N/A	<b>1 fire department</b>
Douglas Population 92,174	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Fayette Population 91,263	N/A	N/A	<b>1 fire department</b>
Fulton Population 816,006	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Gwinnett Population 588,448	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Hall Population 139,277	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Henry Population 119,341	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A
Houston Population 110,765	N/A	N/A	<b>1 fire department</b>
Muscogee Population 186,291	<b>1 paid fire department</b>	N/A	N/A



**COMPARISON OF ISO RATINGS, PERSONNEL, STATIONS AND BUDGETS FOR COUNTIES WITH  
2000 POPULATIONS BETWEEN 76,013 TO 139,277**

**Illustration 2.B**

<b>County</b>	<b>ISO Rating</b>	<b># of Full-time Employees</b>	<b>Full time per 1000 Population</b>	<b># of Volunteers</b>	<b>Volunteers per 1000 Population</b>	<b>Total Full-time and Volunteers</b>	<b>Total full-time and Volunteers per 1000 Population</b>	<b># of County Fire Stations</b>	<b>Personnel Budget</b>	<b>Operating Budget</b>	<b>Capital Budget</b>
Bartow 76,019	6	68	.89	40	.52	108	1.42	13	\$2.3 million	\$1.2 million	Under a 5-year SPLOST netting approx. \$3.5 million
Coweta 89,215	6/10	88	.98	30	.33	118	1.33	14	\$4,417,941	\$337,890	\$1,253,000
Douglas 92,174	4/9	157	1.70	N/A	N/A	157	1.70	9	\$8,570,431	\$593,845	Under a 5-year SPLOST netting approx. \$15 million
Fayette 91,263	4/9	125	1.37	45	.49	170	1.86	9	\$5,074,222	\$577,628	\$1,055,000
Hall 139,277	5/10	278	2.00	N/A	N/A	278	2.00	13	\$12.7 million	\$1.9 million	\$400,000
Henry 119,341	5/9	249	2.09	N/A	N/A	249	2.09	12	\$11.8 million	\$2.3 million	\$600,000
Average 101,215			1.50		.45		1.73	11.66	\$7.5 million	\$1.1 million	\$1.2 million



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## 3. EXISTING FIRE SERVICES IN COLUMBIA COUNTY

Within Columbia County, the Martinez, Appling, Leah, and Winfield fire services operate as private providers controlled by a Board of Directors with an appointed or elected Chief in charge of day-to-day operations. Grovetown and Harlem fire departments are controlled by the municipal government they represent.

Martinez and Grovetown fire departments are currently the only fire services that provide 24-hour paid on-duty personnel.

Harlem, Appling, Winfield, and Leah fire departments have volunteers on call that can be dispatched through a system of radios and pagers. However, Harlem Fire Department has one paid firefighter who works 40 hours per week and Winfield Fire Department has one volunteer who stays at a fire station during weekends from 6:00 p.m. Friday until 6:00 a.m. Monday.

An analysis of existing fire services in Columbia County requires a look at each of the six different fire departments. This analysis will examine:

- Operations
- Equipment
- Budgets
- Districts
- Communications
- Mutual Aid
- Preparation for emergency/disaster operations

Fire departments are identified in the *Columbia County Emergency Operations Plan* (EOP) as having *Primary Responsibility* and *Support Responsibility* as follows:

### Primary Responsibilities:

- Fire Services
- Search and Rescue Services
- Hazardous Materials

### Support Responsibilities:

- Evacuation
- Special Needs
- Water Rescue & Recovery

In addition, various fire departments are tasked to provide Medical First Response Services, with Martinez and Grovetown dividing the vehicle extrication services for the entire jurisdiction. Fire departments in Columbia County have various levels of capabilities to respond to hazardous material incidents. These levels range from none to limited training and equipment capabilities.

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The Columbia County Water Department has a higher level of training and equipment for responding to hazardous material incidents; however, their expertise is limited in scope and would not be sufficient to handle a significant accidental or intentional chemical release. The Augusta-Richmond County and Savannah River Site Hazardous Material Response Teams could be used as a mutual aid resource, but their assistance would be based on their availability at the time of the event.

Illustration 3.A is a map of the current Columbia County Fire Districts and includes most of the major roadways

Appling, Leah, and Winfield Fire Departments are comprised of an “all-volunteer” force. They recognize the limitations imposed on their service during normal “work-day” hours due to the distance their volunteers must travel to secure fire abatement equipment and then drive to the emergency scene. In addition, the volunteers from these three departments routinely respond to each other’s calls. This is currently being done via formal mutual assistance agreements to ensure that the staffing requirements are met. All fire departments stand ready to provide needed assistance throughout the County.

Automatic Mutual Aid Agreements were reinstated between all fire departments in the County and signed on February 27, 2003.

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## **MARTINEZ FIRE DEPARTMENT (MFD)**

### **Coordination**

MFD adheres to the Concept of Operations as described in the EOP. MFD is one of two fire departments in Columbia County that provides Vehicle Extrication Services under contract with the County, at no cost to the County. The MFD coverage area for extrication services is from I-20 mile mark 192 in the County and all areas north of I-20.

In addition, MFD provides first responder medical services, provides for EMA dive rescue team personnel and housing for the dive team equipment, hazardous material response, participates in all emergency training exercises coordinated by the County, participates in all County sponsored community safety events for fire safety education, on-going contingency planning, and participates in all meetings/committees coordinated by the County. MFD also met all of the qualifications and requirements to receive a "Georgia Rescue License" issued by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency. This license provides MFD with the legal authority to perform vehicle extrication services in the State of Georgia.

### **Training**

MFD has an active training department with "in-house" instructors. The MFD training facility is located at fire station #2, located on Gibbs Road in Evans. Both the paid staff and volunteers are required to be certified firefighters. Career/paid personnel are required to complete a minimum of 240 hours of in-service training every year. Volunteers are required to complete a minimum of 96 in-service training hours each year. This is in addition to company training, in which volunteers stay at the fire stations with the crew. In addition to fire suppression training, MFD trains its members in emergency vehicle operations, CPR & First Aid, medical first responder, rescue, vehicle extrication, infection control, incident command and hazardous material response. MFD develops and updates "pre-plans" for all businesses in the Martinez/Evans Fire District semi-annually. Also, all fire hydrants in the Martinez/Evans Fire District are maintained by MFD semi-annually.

### **Public Education**

MFD is extremely proactive in public awareness of fire prevention and safety. Through extensive use of the "Fire Safety House", MFD provides a valuable service to the community. MFD is an active participant in all community safety expositions. MFD also trains County employees, local industries, and retail business, schools, nursing homes, day care centers, etc. on the proper use of fire extinguishers on an annual basis.

### **Budget**

The annual budget for MFD in 2002 was \$3,179,000. The annual revenue for MFD in 2002 was \$3,161,234. Of this total, \$3,034,653 was revenue from fire subscription fees and \$126,581 was from other sources.

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MFD currently has a collection rate of 89%. The 2002 potential of revenue with a 100% collection rate was \$3,555,051.

The 2003 MFD budget is \$3,522,000, which is based on projected subscription collections for 2003. The 2003 potential of revenue with a 100% collection rate is \$3,807,304

County Tax records show that there are currently a total of 27,983 parcels within the Martinez Fire Service District, with 23,518 of those parcels billed for fire subscription fees for a potential total of \$3,790,860.

MFD is a private, non-profit organization with 501-(C)(3) status.

### **ISO Class Rating 4**

MFD provides six fire stations, all of which are fully staffed on a 24-hour basis. The attached County Map (Illustration 3.A) outlines the Fire Districts protected by each of the six fire departments. MFD is responsible for the County's physically largest fire district, which contains the majority of the County's businesses and industrial base, as well as our greatest population centers.

### **Communications**

MFD is a self-dispatched fire service. Some of the calls are received directly to report fires and some calls are transferred from the 9-1-1 Center. They maintain a continuously staffed radio console ensuring professional radio service for their firefighters. Current operational status of communication equipment is confirmed with daily radio testing. The current communications system is rated "excellent."

### **Equipment**

MFD is fully functional and capable of performing the fire, search and rescue, hazardous materials, evacuation, special needs assistance, and support for the water rescue and recovery team as required by the Columbia County EOP. The following table describes the types of major equipment maintained at the fire stations. MFD also maintains normal and expected equipment required for safety and operations. MFD does have minimal hazardous material response equipment.

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Station Name & Address	Major Equipment	Year of Equipment	# of Paid Staff	# of Volunteer Staff
Station #1 3846 Washington Road Martinez, GA 30907	Class A Pumper Class A Pumper Rescue – Command Chief’s Car Support Car	2001 1982 2000 1999 1993	18	75 (Station #1 makes all volunteer assignments to other stations)
Station #2 518 Gibbs Road Evans, GA 30809	Class A Pumper Class A Pumper Rescue Truck Training Car Utility Truck Shop Truck	2001 1988 2001 1994 1991 1997	10	
Station #3 704 Fury’s Ferry Road Evans, GA 30809	Class A Pumper Aerial Ladder/Pump Utility Van	2001 1986 1993	7	
Station #4 4590 Oakley Pirkle Road Martinez, GA 30809	Class A Pumper Class A Pumper	1999 1993	7	
Station #5 5074 Hardy McManus Road Evans, GA 30809	Class A Pumper Fire Safety House	1991 1990	7	
Station #6 2264 William Few Parkway Evans, GA 30809	Class A Pumper	1996	7	
<b>TOTAL # OF PERSONNEL</b>			<b>56</b>	<b>75</b>

### Mutual Aid

MFD did not make any requests to other fire departments for mutual aid during 2002.

### District Coverage

MFD currently has full coverage within the file mile area of each fire station within its district and does not

### Emergency Management Agency Interactions

- MFD and the Columbia County EMA have a positive and continuing working relationship, ensuring the safety and well being of the citizens located in the Martinez-Evans area.
- This relationship spans the areas of fire, search and rescue, hazardous material incidents, evacuation, special needs assistance, support for the water rescue and recovery team, bomb threats, natural gas leaks, and manpower needs.

## DRAFT

- State and local training courses are made available through EMA. MFD had 83 members participate in EMA sponsored courses in 2001 and 75 members participate in EMA sponsored courses in 2002.
- MFD has a contract with Columbia County, which allows them to provide vehicle extrication services in a coverage area of I-20 and north of I-20. This coverage area crosses over into other fire districts throughout the County.
- MFD also met all requirements needed to be awarded a State Rescue License by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency.
- MFD provides support personnel for the dive rescue and recovery team, as well as housing for the dive team boat, trailer, rescue truck, and equipment.
- MFD provides free fire extinguisher training for all County employees on a yearly basis.
- MFD provides housing for EMS personnel and equipment at MFD Station #3.

### Immediate Concerns

There is currently “district overlap” with other fire departments in the Ivy Falls Subdivision. The majority of this subdivision lies within the MFD fire district, but as the subdivision has been further developed, some of this subdivision fell into other fire districts.

This overlap creates confusion with dispatchers and responders, as well as the citizens living in Ivy Falls.

MFD states that it does not wish to release their portion of Ivy Falls Subdivision to another fire district. Also, MFD is not aware of any future planned subdivisions that will potentially overlap fire districts.

### MFD Departmental 5-year Goals

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Hire 3 firefighters</li><li>- New HQ building</li><li>- Order aerial truck for 2004 delivery</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Hire 3 firefighters</li><li>- Receive new aerial truck</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Hire 3 firefighters</li><li>- Order Class A fire engine for 2006 delivery</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Hire 3 firefighters</li><li>- Search for land for Engine Co. #7</li><li>- Take delivery of new Class A fire engine</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Hire 3 firefighters</li><li>- Construct Engine Co. #7 to be staffed 24/7</li></ul>

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## **GROVETOWN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY (GDPS)**

### **Coordination**

GDPS adheres to the Concept of Operations as described in the EOP. GDPS is one of two fire departments in Columbia County that provides Vehicle Extrication Services under contract with the County, at no cost to the County. The GDPS coverage area for extrication services is from I-20 mile marker 192 to the County line and all areas south of I-20 in Columbia County.

Additionally, GDPS provides fire protection, first responder medical services, fire prevention and education programs, participates in all emergency training exercises coordinated by the County, on-going contingency planning, participates in all meetings/committees coordinated by the EMA, and conducts fire inspections upon request.

GDPS also met all of the qualifications and requirements to receive a “Georgia Rescue License”, issued by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency. This license provides GDPS with the legal authority to perform vehicle extrication services in the State of Georgia.

### **Training**

Volunteers at GDPS are required to become Mod 1 certified and to attend weekly training, as well as working duty hours.

### **Public Education**

GDPS is very proactive in public awareness of fire prevention and safety. GDPS participates in area safety expositions, as well as providing demonstrations and educational opportunities for Grovetown residents and fire districts.

### **Budget**

The annual budget for GDPS in 2002 was \$145,179. The annual revenue for GDPS in 2002 was \$145,179. Of this total, \$110,478 was revenue from fire subscription fees and \$34,701 was from the City of Grovetown tax base.

GDPS currently has a collection rate of 54%. The current potential of revenue with a 100% collection rate is \$203,855.

County Tax records show that there are currently a total of 4,302 parcels within the Grovetown Fire Service District, with 1,759 of those parcels billed for fire subscription fees for a potential total of \$200,041.

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## ISO Class Rating 5

GDPS provides two fire stations, both of which are fully staffed on a 24-hour basis. The attached County Map (Illustration 3.A) outlines the Fire Districts protected by each of the six fire departments. The GDPS district includes all of the City of Grovetown city limits and large portion of the unincorporated area. There is no station located in the unincorporated portion of the Grovetown fire district. The demographics of this fire district include dense urban population, heavy business activity, and a large industrial base, including Horizon South Industrial Park and John Deere Corporation, as well as several public facilities, such as the Senior Center, Euchee Creek Library, and the Euchee Creek Elementary School.

## Communications

GDPS is a self-dispatched service. Some of the calls are received directly to report fires and some calls are transferred from the 9-1-1 Center. They maintain a continuously staffed radio console ensuring professional radio service for their firefighters. Current operational status of communication equipment is confirmed with daily radio testing. The current communications system is rated “meets expectations”. Improvements include the need for an updated/upgraded system.

## Equipment

GDPS maintains the following fire fighting heavy equipment and normal and expected equipment required for safety and operations. GDPS does have minimal hazardous material response equipment.

Station Name & Address	Major Equipment	Year of Equipment	# of Paid Staff	# of Volunteer Staff
Station #1 306 E. Robinson Avenue Grovetown, GA 30813	1250 GPM Engine 1500 Gal. Tanker/Pump 8,000 Gal. Tanker Rescue Unit Brush Unit	1996 1990 1967 2000 1994	18	18 (Station #1 makes all volunteer assignments to other stations)
Station #2 106 W. Robinson Avenue Grovetown, GA 30813	1250 GPM Engine 1000 GPM Engine Cascade/Support Trailer	1988 1980 2000		
<b>TOTAL # OF PERSONNEL</b>			<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>

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## **Mutual Aid**

GDPS made the following requests to other fire departments for mutual aid during 2002:

1. Fort Gordon Fire Department – 1 request
2. Martinez Fire Department – 1 request
3. Augusta-Richmond County Fire Department – 1 request
4. Harlem Fire Department – 1 request

## **District Coverage**

GDPS currently has full coverage within the file mile area of each fire station within its district.

## **Emergency Management Agency Interactions**

- GDPS and the Columbia County EMA have a positive and continuing working relationship, ensuring the safety and well being of the citizens located in the City of Grovetown.
- This relationship spans the areas of fire, search and rescue, hazardous material incidents, evacuation, special needs assistance, bomb threats, natural gas leaks, and manpower needs.
- State and local training courses are made available through EMA. GDPS had 27 members participate in EMA sponsored courses in 2001 and 22 members participate in EMA sponsored courses in 2002.
- GDPS has a contract with Columbia County, which allows them to provide vehicle extrication services in a coverage area from I-20 mile marker 192 to the County line and all areas south of I-20 in Columbia County.
- GDPS also met all requirements needed to be awarded a State Rescue License by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency.

## **Immediate Concerns**

There is currently “district overlap” with other fire departments in the Ivy Falls Subdivision. The majority of this subdivision lies within the MFD fire district, but as the subdivision has been further developed, some of this subdivision fell into other fire districts. This overlap creates confusion with dispatchers and responders, as well as the citizens living in Ivy Falls.

GDPS states that it does not wish to release their portion of Ivy Falls Subdivision to another fire district. Also, GDPS is not aware of any future planned subdivisions that will potentially overlap fire districts.

# DRAFT

## Departmental Goals

2003	2004	2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Order new fire engine</li><li>- Begin planning for a training complex</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Build a fully staffed 24-hour fire station in the areas of Highway 223 and Louisville</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Build an un-staffed fire station in the area of Harlem-Grovetown Road and Young</li></ul>

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## **HARLEM FIRE DEPARTMENT (HFD)**

### **Coordination**

HFD adheres to the Concept of Operations as described in the EOP. Additionally, HFD provides fire suppression, first responder medical services, fire prevention and education programs, participates in all emergency training exercises coordinated by the County, on-going contingency planning, and participates in some meetings/committees coordinated by the County. Participation is limited because the HFD fire chief is a volunteer, who works a full time job. HFD has one paid firefighter, who works a 40-hour workweek. The Harlem Police Chief also serves as a firefighter.

### **Training**

HFD requires all volunteers to exceed the minimum requirement of 96 hours per year, as set forth by the Georgia State Firefighters Pension Fund.

### **Public Education**

HFD conducts fire prevention and fire safety education programs for the community.

### **Budget**

The annual budget for HFD in 2002 was \$109,175. The annual revenue for HFD in 2002 was \$109,175. Of this total, \$65,000 was revenue from fire subscription fees and \$44,175 was from the City of Harlem tax base.

HFD currently has a collection rate of 50%. The current potential of revenue with a 100% collection rate is \$133,272.

County Tax records show that there are currently a total of 3,582 parcels within the Harlem Fire Service District, with 1,885 of those parcels billed for fire subscription fees for a potential total of \$111,244.

### **ISO Class Rating 6/9**

(A 6 rating for areas located within a five-mile radius of fire stations and a 9 rating for rural areas located out of the five-mile radius of fire stations)

HFD provides two fire stations, both un-staffed on a 24-hour basis. The attached County Map (Illustration 3.A) outlines the Fire Districts protected by each of the six fire departments. The HFD district includes all of the City of Harlem city limits and large portion of the unincorporated area. There is no station located in the unincorporated portion of the Harlem fire district, which is not within five road miles of the nearest fire station. The demographics of this fire district include both rural and suburban population and a central business area.

# DRAFT

## Communications

HFD is dispatched through the Harlem Police Department. Some of the calls are received directly to report fires and some calls are transferred from the 9-1-1 Center. The current communications system is rated “meets expectations”. Improvements include the need for a new repeater, which has been purchased. HFD is currently waiting on the FCC licensing for frequencies.

## Equipment

HFD maintains the following fire fighting heavy equipment and normal and expected equipment required for safety and operations.

Station Name & Address	Major Equipment	Year of Equipment	# of Paid Staff	# of Volunteer Staff
Station #1 110 New Street Harlem, GA 30814	Class A Pumper GFC Fire Knocker Tanker Truck	1970 1989 1988	1 (40 hour work week)	25 (Station #1 makes all volunteer assignments to other stations)
Station #2 120 S. Hicks Street Harlem, GA 30814	Class A Pumper Equipment Truck	1986 1987		
<b>TOTAL # OF PERSONNEL</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>25</b>

## Mutual Aid

HFD made the following requests to other fire departments for mutual aid during 2002:

1. McDuffie County Fire Department – 2

## District Coverage

HFD currently does not have full coverage within the five mile area of each fire station within its district. Areas outside of the five-mile area are (1) Louisville Road and Wrightsboro Road to I-20 and (2) County Line Road in the area of E. Whiteoak Road and Whiteoak Campground.

## Emergency Management Agency Interactions

- HFD and the Columbia County EMA have a positive and continuing working relationship, ensuring the safety and well being of the citizens located in the City of Harlem.

## **DRAFT**

- This relationship spans the areas of fire, search and rescue, hazardous material incidents, evacuation, special needs assistance, bomb threats, natural gas leaks, and manpower needs.
- State and local training courses are made available through EMA. HFD had 5 members participate in EMA sponsored courses in 2001 and 4 members participate in EMA sponsored courses in 2002.
- HFD's fire chief is unable to participate in many of the planning and coordinating meetings conducted by EMA due to his full time job requirements.

### **Immediate Concerns**

There is currently no "district overlap" with other fire departments.

### **Departmental Goals**

<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
- Build an un-staffed fire station in the Wrightsboro Road area of Hinton Wilson Road and Whiteoak Road		

# **DRAFT**

## **APPLING FIRE DEPARTMENT (AFD)**

### **Coordination**

AFD adheres to the Concept of Operations as described in the EOP. Additionally, AFD provides fire suppression, first responder medical services, hazardous material response, accident scene, fire prevention and education programs, medical air and ground traffic control, and participates emergency planning meetings and training exercises coordinated by the County. AFD consists of volunteers that reside in the Appling fire district, but work throughout the CSRA.

### **Training**

AFD is an all-volunteer organization that requires volunteers to complete 60 hours of training a year. However, over 70% of the regular volunteers have over 100 hours of training a year. Training includes Medical First Responder training and Basic Life Support. AFD also has several volunteers trained in vehicle extrication and rescue service, even though the department is not licensed to conduct these services in the State of Georgia.

### **Public Education**

AFD conducts fire prevention and fire safety education programs for the community. AFD participates in area safety expositions as well as providing demonstrations and educational opportunities for their subscribers.

### **Budget**

The annual budget for AFD in 2002 was \$65,000. The annual revenue for AFD in 2002 was \$87,760. Of this total, \$79,911 was revenue from fire subscription fees and \$7,848 was from other sources of income.

AFD currently has a collection rate of 73%. The current potential of revenue with a 100% collection rate is \$109,754.

The 2003 AFD budget is \$ 80,000, which is based on projected subscription collections for 2003 in the amount of \$85,000 .

County Tax records show that there are currently a total of 1,670 parcels within the Appling Fire Service District, with 1,076 of those parcels billed for fire subscription fees for a potential total of \$104,103.

AFD is a private, non-profit organization with 501-(C)(3) status.

### **ISO Class Rating 6/9**

(A 6 rating for areas located within a five-mile radius of fire stations and a 9 rating for rural areas located out of the five-mile radius of fire stations)

## DRAFT

AFD provides three un-staffed fire stations in the Appling fire district, plus an un-staffed “temporary station”. The attached County Map (Illustration 3.A) outlines the Fire Districts protected by each of the six fire departments. The AFD district encompasses a large geographical area that is predominately rural. However, the area is rapidly becoming urbanized with several new subdivisions being added since the previous fire study was conducted and the district also contains several governmental office complexes in the central Appling area.

### Communications

AFD is dispatched through the Columbia County 9-1-1 Center. The current communications system is rated “meets expectations”. Improvements made since the previous fire study include the purchase and installation of a new repeater by the County.

### Equipment

AFD maintains the following fire fighting heavy equipment and normal and expected equipment required for safety and operations.

Station Name & Address	Major Equipment	Year of Equipment	# of Paid Staff	# of Volunteer Staff
Station #1 1948 Appling Harlem Highway Appling, GA 30802	1250 GPM Pumper 1000 GPM Pumper 950 Gal. Tanker	2000 1980 1969	0	9
Station #2 2733 Louisville Road Appling, GA 30802	1000 GPM Pumper 750 GPM Reserve Pumper	1988 1962	0	5
Station #3 5830 Columbia Road Appling, GA 30802	1000 GPM Pumper Chevy Equipment Van	1981 1985	0	7
Station #4 2326 Morris Callaway Road Appling, GA 30802	1000 GPM Pumper	1984	0	4
<b>TOTAL # OF PERSONNEL</b>			<b>0</b>	<b>25</b>

### Mutual Aid

AFD made the following requests to other fire departments for mutual aid during 2002:

1. Harlem Fire Department – 2
2. Leah Fire Department – 2
3. Martinez Fire Department – 1
4. Winfield Fire Department - 2

# DRAFT

## District Coverage

There are three un-staffed fire stations in the Appling fire district, plus an un-staffed “temporary station”. However, the area located within the Appling fire district is included within five road miles of the nearest fire station, if the temporary station is included.

## Emergency Management Agency Interactions

- AFD and the Columbia County EMA have a positive and continuing working relationship, ensuring the safety and well being of the citizens located in the Appling fire district.
- This relationship spans the areas of fire, search and rescue, hazardous material incidents, evacuation, special needs assistance, bomb threats, natural gas leaks, and manpower needs.
- State and local training courses are made available through EMA. AFD had 9 members participate in EMA sponsored courses in 2001 and 18 members participate in EMA sponsored courses in 2002.
- On occasion, the initial response to the scene of a fire consists of AFD personnel only, without fire abatement equipment.

## Immediate Concerns

- There is currently no “district overlap” with other fire departments. However, future growth of Ivy Falls Subdivision has the potential to overlap with the Appling fire district on the eastern side is Chamberlin Road. It was not noted if Appling Fire Department would be willing to release that portion to the fire department currently having the majority of that subdivision. Note: Residents living in Ivy Falls have reported receiving “fire subscription fee bills” from the following three fire departments in the past: MFD, GDPS, and APD.
- AFD also noted that they need many items, some of which include two tanker trucks and turnout gear for the firefighters.

## Departmental Goals

2003		
- Plans are underway to build another un-staffed fire station. AFD is currently looking at two potential sites for the new station. No target date was provided.	NA	NA

# **DRAFT**

## **LEAH FIRE DEPARTMENT (LFD)**

### **Coordination**

LFD adheres to the Concept of Operations as described in the EOP. Additionally, LFD provides fire suppression, first responder medical services, rescue services, pre-plans for businesses, community CPR classes, fire hydrant inspections & upkeep, and participates emergency planning meetings and training exercises coordinated by the County. LFD consists of volunteers that reside in the Leah fire district, but work throughout the CSRA.

### **Training**

LFD requires volunteers to meet or exceed 120 hours of training a year. Other training includes Medical First Responder, State of Georgia Fire 101 Certification, Rescue Specialist, Hazardous Materials Awareness Level, Blood Borne Pathogens, and vehicle extrication training.

LFD also met all of the qualifications and requirements to receive a “Georgia Rescue License”, issued by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency. This license provides LFD with the legal authority to perform vehicle extrication services in the State of Georgia. However, the vehicle extrication service is only contracted by Columbia County with Martinez Fire Department and Grovetown Department of Public Safety. Leah is currently supporting the Martinez Fire Department by providing this service in the Leah fire district, the Appling fire district to the Old Courthouse if called, and in the Winfield fire district if called.

### **Public Education**

LFD is active in public awareness of fire prevention and safety. LFD participates in area safety expositions as well as providing demonstrations and educational opportunities for their subscribers.

### **Budget**

The annual budget for LFD in 2002 was \$70,000. The annual revenue for LFD in 2002 was \$69,630. Of this total, \$63,040 was revenue from fire subscription fees and \$6,589 was from other sources of income.

LFD currently has a collection rate of 70%. The current potential of revenue with a 100% collection rate is \$90,000.

The 2003 LFD budget is \$ 70,000, which is based on projected subscription collections for 2003 in the expected amount of \$79,000.

County Tax records show that there are currently a total of 1,137 parcels within the Leah Fire Service District, with 763 of those parcels billed for fire subscription fees for a potential total of \$64,221.

# DRAFT

LFD is a private, non-profit organization with 501-(C)(3) status.

## ISO Class Rating 6/9

(A 6 rating for areas located within a five-mile radius of fire stations and a 9 rating for rural areas located out of the five-mile radius of fire stations)

LFD provides two fire stations, both un-staffed on a 24-hour basis. The attached County Map (Illustration 3.A ) outlines the Fire Districts protected by each of the six fire departments. The LFD district is the most northern fire district and is predominately rural. LFD is responsible for the majority of the infrastructure that supports activities on Lake Thurmond and a large lumber mill operation on Washington Road.

## Communications

LFD is dispatched through the Columbia County 9-1-1 Center. The current communications system is rated “meets expectations”. Improvements made since the previous fire study include the purchase and installation of a new repeater by the County.

## Equipment

LFD maintains the following fire fighting heavy equipment and normal and expected equipment required for safety and operations.

Station Name & Address	Major Equipment	Year of Equipment	# of Paid Staff	# of Volunteer Staff
Station #1 6605 Washington Road Appling, GA 30802	1250 GPM Pumper 500 GPM Pumper 1000 GPM Pumper Chevy Utility Truck	1996 1992 1976 1985	0	26 (This is the total number of volunteers with LFD)
Station #2 Burkes Mountain Road Appling, GA 30802	500 GPM Pumper 2500 Tanker Truck	1968 1986	0	
<b>TOTAL # OF PERSONNEL</b>			<b>0</b>	<b>26</b>

## Mutual Aid

LFD made the following requests to other fire departments for mutual aid during 2002:

1. Appling Fire Department – 2
2. Martinez Fire Department – 2
3. Winfield Fire Department – 2

# DRAFT

## District Coverage

There are two un-staffed fire stations in the Leah fire district. However, the area located within the Leah fire district is included within five road miles of the nearest fire station.

## Emergency Management Agency Interactions

- LFD and the Columbia County EMA have a positive and continuing working relationship, ensuring the safety and well being of the citizens located in the Leah fire district.
- This relationship spans the areas of fire, search and rescue, hazardous material incidents, evacuation, special needs assistance, bomb threats, natural gas leaks, and manpower needs.
- State and local training courses are made available through EMA. LFD had 5 members participate in EMA sponsored courses in 2001 and 4 members participate in EMA sponsored courses in 2002.
- LFD fire station #2 is used as a Columbia County voting precinct and both stations are used for community meeting halls.
- On occasion, the initial response to the scene of a fire consists of LFD personnel only, without fire abatement equipment.

## Immediate Concerns

- The LFD's fire district overlaps in three locations with three other fire districts, as follows:
  1. Overlap with Appling Fire Department at Phinizy on Cobbham Road
  2. Overlap with Martinez Fire Department at King Villa on Tubman Road
  3. Overlap with Winfield Fire Department at Tom Bartles Road and Cobbham Road

District overlap creates confusion for dispatchers and responders, as well as the citizens living in the affected areas. LFD states that it does not wish to release their portion district overlap to another fire district. Also, LFD is not aware of any future planned subdivisions that will potentially overlap fire districts.

- LFD also expresses their concern over coverage during the daytime and the need for paid firefighters.

## Departmental Goals

2003		
- Plans are underway to build un-staffed fire stations on Clarks Hill Road and on Cobbham Road at Phinizy. No target date was provided.	NA	NA

# **DRAFT**

## **WINFIELD FIRE DEPARTMENT (WFD)**

### **Coordination**

WFD adheres to the Concept of Operations as described in the EOP. Additionally, WFD provides fire services and first responder medical services. WFD consists of volunteers that reside in the Winfield fire district, but work throughout the CSRA.

### **Training**

WFD requires volunteers to be Fire 101 certified and First Responder certified. Their training consists of 50% training and 50% fire calls.

### **Public Education**

WFD is active in public awareness of fire prevention and safety. WFD participates in area safety expositions as well as providing demonstrations and educational opportunities for their subscribers.

### **Budget**

The WFD reported all budget questions as “N/A”, and no information was provided. However, in the previous fire study, WFD reported a budget of \$16,000, with projected subscription revenues of \$25,700. Also, no information was provided regarding the WFD collection rate. It was stated that 100% of the WFD revenue is derived from subscription fees.

WFD advised that all subscription fee and budget information must be approved by subscribers at their annual meeting. No date for that meeting was provided.

County Tax records show that there are currently a total of 969 parcels within the Winfield Fire Service District, with 606 of those parcels billed for fire subscription fees for a potential total of \$64,221.

WFD is a private, non-profit organization.

### **ISO Class Rating 7/9**

(A 7 rating for areas located within a five-mile radius of fire stations and a 9 rating for rural areas located out of the five-mile radius of fire stations)

WFD provides three fire stations, all of which are un-staffed on a 24-hour basis. (Note that one of the WFD fire stations is staffed from 6 p.m. on Friday until 6 a.m. on Monday.) The attached County Map (Illustration 3.A) outlines the Fire Districts protected by each of the six fire departments. The WFD district is the most western fire district and is predominately rural. The WFD fire district is experiencing growth in subdivisions and development of lake area properties.

# DRAFT

## Communications

WFD is dispatched through the Columbia County 9-1-1 Center. The current communications system is rated “meets expectations”. Improvements made since the previous fire study include the purchase and installation of a new repeater by the County. WFD noted that a full time dispatcher for fire service would improve communications for fire services.

## Equipment

WFD maintains the following fire fighting heavy equipment and normal and expected equipment required for safety and operations.

Station Name & Address	Major Equipment	Year of Equipment	# of Paid Staff	# of Volunteer Staff
Station #1 6285 Cobbham Road	Pumper Pumper Tanker Truck Tanker Truck	1976 1968 1974 1989	0	9 (This is the total number of volunteers with WFD)
Station #2 6880 Deercrest	Pumper	1975	0	
Station#3 7576 Winfield Road	Pumper	1974		
<b>TOTAL # OF PERSONNEL</b>			<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>

## Mutual Aid

WFD made the following requests to other fire departments for mutual aid during 2002:

1. Appling Fire Department – 3
2. Leah Fire Department – 3
3. Martinez Fire Department - 1

## District Coverage

There are three un-staffed fire stations in the Winfield fire district. However, the area located within the Winfield fire district is included within five road miles of the nearest fire station.

## Emergency Management Agency Interactions

- WFD and the Columbia County EMA have a positive and continuing working relationship, ensuring the safety and well being of the citizens located in the Leah fire district.

## **DRAFT**

- This relationship spans the areas of fire, search and rescue, hazardous material incidents, evacuation, special needs assistance, bomb threats, natural gas leaks, and manpower needs.
- State and local training courses are made available through EMA. WFD had 0 members participate in EMA sponsored courses in 2001 and 0 members participate in EMA sponsored courses in 2002.
- Due to full time jobs, WFD is not available to participate in planning and exercises with EMA.

### **Immediate Concerns**

WFD states that there is no “district overlap” within their fire district. This conflicts with information provided by Leah Fire Department.

WFD states that the question of releasing portions of their fire district where “overlap” exists is “not applicable”. Also, WFD is not aware of any future planned subdivisions that will potentially overlap fire districts.

### **Departmental Goals**

<b>2003</b>		
- Plans are underway to add an un-staffed fire station 7199 Moontown Road. No target date was provided.	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>

# DRAFT

## Brief Summary of Fire Department Information

### Coordination

Activities beyond fire suppression include:

Unit	Concept of Operations	Vehicle Extrication	Coverage Area	First Responder	Assists EMA Dive Team	County Emergency Training	Community Safety Events	On-going Contingency Planning	Fire Inspections
Martinez	√	√ -GA Rescue License	I-20 mil mark 192 and all areas north of I-20	√	√	√	√	√	
Grovetown	√	GA Rescue License – supports Martinez and Leah	I-20 mil mark 192 and all areas south of I-20	√		√	√	√	√
Harlem	√			√		√	√		
Appling	√			√		√	√		
Leah	√	√ - GA Rescue License		√		√	√		
Winfield	√			√					
Forestry	√						√	√	

### Training and Public Education

Unit	In-House Instructors	Training Facility	Career 240 Hours of annual Inservice	Volunteers Hours of annual Inservice	Other Training	Pre-Plans for All Businesses	Fire Hydrants Maintained	Public Awareness	Training for businesses
Martinez	√	√	√	96 hours	√	√	Semi-annual	√	√
Grovetown				Mod 1	√			√	
Harlem				96				√	
Appling				60	√			√	
Leah				120	√			√	
Winfield				Fire 101				√	
Forestry								√	

Training other than fire suppression includes: CPR & First Aid, medical first responder, rescue, vehicle extrication, infection control, incident command and hazardous material response. All departments are extremely proactive in public awareness of fire prevention and safety.

# DRAFT

## Equipment

Unit	# of Stations	Major Equipment (date of acquisition)	# of Paid Staff	# of Volunteers
Martinez	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9 Class A Pumpers - 3 (2001), 1 each in 1999, 1996, 1993, 1991, 1988, and 1982</li> <li>Aerial Ladder/Pump (1986)</li> <li>Fire Safety House (1990)</li> <li>Utility Van (1993)</li> <li>Rescue – Command (2000)</li> <li>Cars – 1 Chief's (1999), 1 support (1993), and 1 training (1994)</li> <li>Trucks – 1 rescue (2001), 1 utility (1991), and 1 shop (1997)</li> </ul>	56	75
Grovetown	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1250 GPM engine – 1 (1996) and 1 (1988)</li> <li>1500 Gallon tank/pumper – 1 (1990)</li> <li>8,000 gallon tanker – 1 (1967)</li> <li>1000 GPM engine – 1 (1980)</li> <li>Rescue unit – 1 (2000)</li> <li>Brush unit – 1 (1994)</li> <li>Cascade/support trailer – 1 (2000)</li> </ul>	18	18
Harlem	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Class A Pumper – 1 (1986) and 1 (1970)</li> <li>GFC Fire Knocker (1989)</li> <li>Truck – 1 tanker (1988) and 1 equipment (1987)</li> </ul>	1	25
Appling	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1250 GPM Pumper (2000)</li> <li>3 1000 GPM Pumper (1988, 1984, and 1981)</li> <li>950 gallon tanker (1969)</li> <li>750 GPM reserve pumper (1962)</li> <li>Chevy equipment van (1985)</li> </ul>	0	25
Leah	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1250 GMP Pumper (1996)</li> <li>2 500 GPM Pumper (1992 and 1986)</li> <li>1000 GPM Pumper (1976)</li> <li>2500 tanker truck (1986)</li> <li>Chevy utility truck (1985)</li> </ul>	0	26
Winfield	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Pumpers (1976, 1975, 1974, and 1968)</li> <li>2 Tanker trucks (1989 and 1974)</li> </ul>	0	9
Forestry	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 2001 Ford Pickups – 1 water and 1 type 7</li> <li>International transport tandem (1993)</li> <li>Ford transport tandem (1989)</li> <li>2 John Deere 450 G lift plow V – winch (1993 and 1990)</li> <li>Jubilee farm tractor blade (1953)</li> </ul>	3	0

# DRAFT

## ISO Class Rating, Communications, Mutual Aid, and District Coverage

Unit	ISO Rating	Communications	Mutual Aid	District Coverage
Martinez	4	Self-dispatched and 9-1-1 – system rated “excellent”		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full coverage within the 5 miles area of each station</li> <li>• Physically largest fire district</li> <li>• Majority of businesses and industrial base</li> <li>• Greatest population centers</li> </ul>
Grovetown	5	Self-dispatched and 9-1-1 – system rated “meets expectations”	4 requests to other fire departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full coverage within the 5 miles area of each station</li> <li>• Dense urban population</li> <li>• Heavy business activity and industrial base</li> <li>• Several schools and public facilities</li> </ul>
Harlem	6/9 depending on whether within 5 mile radius of fire station	Dispatched through the Harlem Police Department and 9-1-1 – system rated “meets expectations”	2 requests to other fire departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not have full coverage within the 5 mile area of each station.</li> <li>• Outside areas include: (1) Louisville Rd and Wrightsboro Rd to I-20 and (2) County Line Rd in the area of E. Whiteoak Rd and Whiteoak Campground</li> </ul>
Appling	6/9 depending on whether within 5 mile radius of fire station	Dispatched through County’s 9-1-1 system rated “meets expectations”	7 requests to other fire departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full coverage within the 5 miles area of each station if temporary station is included</li> <li>• Rapid urban growth</li> <li>• Several governmental office complexes</li> </ul>
Leah	6/9 depending on whether within 5 mile radius of fire station	Dispatched through County’s 9-1-1 system rated “meets expectations”	6 requests to other fire departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full coverage within the 5 miles area of each station</li> <li>• Infrastructure supporting Lake Thurmond and lumber mill operations</li> </ul>
Winfield	7/9 depending on whether within 5 mile radius of fire station	Dispatched through County’s 9-1-1 system rated “meets expectations”	7 requests to other fire departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full coverage within the 5 miles area of each station</li> <li>• Most western fire district</li> <li>• Predominately rural, but growth in subdivisions and lake area properties</li> </ul>
Forestry		Dispatched through County’s 9-1-1, phone, pager, radio - system rated “meets expectations”	33 requests to other fire departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Covers whole county</li> <li>• Provides a range of services to include but not limited to burn permits, seedling sales, disease control, and disaster emergency support</li> </ul>

# DRAFT

## Immediate Concerns and Long-Term Goals

Unit	Immediate Concerns	Goals
Martinez	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District overlap in the Ivy Falls Subdivision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2003 - hire 3 firefighters               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- new HQ building</li> <li>- order aerial truck for 2004 delivery</li> </ul> </li> <li>2004 – hire 3 firefighters               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- receive new aerial truck</li> </ul> </li> <li>2005 – hire 3 firefighters               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- order Class A fire engine for 2006 delivery</li> </ul> </li> <li>2006 - hire 3 firefighters               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Search for land for Engine Co. #7</li> <li>- take delivery of new Class A fire engine</li> </ul> </li> <li>2007 – hire 3 firefighters               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- construct Engine Co. #7 to be staffed 24/7</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Grovetown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District overlap in the Ivy Falls Subdivision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2003 – order new fire engine               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- begin planning for a training complex</li> <li>- improve communications</li> </ul> </li> <li>2004 – build a fully staffed 24-hour fire station in the areas of Highway 223 and Louisville</li> <li>2005 – Build an unstaffed fire station in the area of Harlem-Grovetown Road and Young</li> </ul>
Harlem		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2004 – build an unstaffed fire station in the Wrightsboro Road area of Hinton Wilson Road and Whiteoak Road</li> </ul>
Appling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential district overlap in the Ivy Falls Subdivision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plans are underway to build another unstaffed fire station. Two sites are being considered and there is no target date for completion.</li> </ul>
Leah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overlap with Appling Fire Department at Phinizy on Cobbham Road</li> <li>Overlap with Martinez Fire Department at King Villa on Tubman Road</li> <li>Overlap with Winfield Fire Department at Tom Bartles Road and Cobbham Road</li> <li>Need for daytime coverage and paid firefighters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plans are underway to build an unstaffed fire stations on Clarks Hill Road and on Cobbham Road at Phinizy. No target date was provided.</li> </ul>
Winfield		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plans are underway to add an unstaffed fire station at 7199 Moontown Road. No target date was provided</li> </ul>
Forestry		

# DRAFT

## Communications

The Columbia County 9-1-1 Communications Center, operated by the Sheriff's Office, has the primary responsibility to coordinate emergency communications between all emergency response agencies, including fire services.

The 9-1-1 Center is a critical link in the emergency response for both small-scale emergencies and large-scale disasters. Dispatchers are responsible for notifying key departments and individuals for assistance, as well as activation of certain warning equipment. When they are left out of the "loop", there is a loss of time to activate personnel and systems that could affect the outcome of the emergency/disaster.

Calls for fire department emergency assistance should be coordinated and handled through the 9-1-1 Center. However some emergency calls are made directly to the fire stations having 24-hour dispatching capabilities such as Martinez Fire Department, Harlem Fire Department, and the Grovetown Department of Public Safety.

The following table outlines how emergency calls for assistance are handled:

Department	% Of emergency calls through the 9-1-1 Center & Transferred to the Department	% Of emergency calls directly to the Department	Comments By Departments
<b>Martinez Fire Department</b> (In-house 24-hour dispatcher on duty)	97%	3% (or less)	Vast majority of emergency calls are received by 9-1-1 and transferred to the MFD Dispatcher.
<b>Grovetown DPS</b> (In-house 24-hour dispatcher on duty)	10%	90%	Vast majority of emergency calls are made directly to the Grovetown Dispatcher. (Due to citizen preference and time saved. Citizens are not encouraged to dial 9-1-1.)
<b>Harlem Fire Department</b> (In-house 24-hour dispatcher on duty)	30%	70%	Vast majority of emergency calls are made directly to the HFD Dispatcher. (A strong public education program is being presented to teach people to dial 9-1-1 to change this trend. Citizens are encouraged to dial 9-1-1.)
<b>Appling Fire Department</b>	100%	0%	All calls are dispatched from the 9-1-1 Center. A repeater was purchased and is maintained by the County to provide communications.
<b>Leah Fire Department</b>	100%	0%	All calls are dispatched from the 9-1-1 Center. A repeater was purchased and is maintained by the County to provide communications.
<b>Winfield Fire Department</b>	100%	0%	All calls are dispatched from the 9-1-1 Center. A repeater was purchased and is maintained by the County to provide communications.

# DRAFT

## SUMMARY OF CALLS DURING 2002

TYPE OF CALL	MARTINEZ	GROVETOWN	HARLEM	APPLING	LEAH	WINFIELD
All other responses	277	154	1			
Auxiliary structure fires (barn)	6			2		
Carbon monoxide calls	22					
Controlled burn calls	86					
Explosion			1			
False alarms		42	22	20	9	
Fire alarm calls	370					
Flood call				1		
Good intent calls			20			
Grass fires	51	14	13			
Hazardous conditions calls			12			
Hazardous materials calls		6				
Hot spots call				1		
Medical first responder calls	974	439	34	15	29	
Mobile structure fires			1			
Mutual aid calls	6				4	
Non-structure fires					20	
Other fires		14	2		30	
Power lines down call				1		
Primary structure fires	89	18	9	11	10	
Public service calls	63					
Rubbish/dumpster fires			3	1		
Service calls			6			
Vehicle extrication	329					
Vehicle fires	48	18	6	12		
Woods fires	23			10		
TOTAL	2,344	705	130	74	102	20
AVE. RESPONSE TIME	4 minutes or less for a minimum of 90% of calls	4.35 minutes	6.10 minutes	6.21 minutes	8 minutes	

# DRAFT

## **Fire Department Boards of Directors**

### **Martinez Fire Department – 6 Board members**

Mort Lindner – President  
Daniel Gwinn – Vice President  
Marianne Shore – Secretary  
James Champion – Treasurer  
Richard Thigpen – Member  
Ray Troiano – Member

### **Grovetown Department of Public Safety – Mayor & City Council**

### **Harlem Fire Department – Mayor & City Council**

### **Appling Fire Department – 12 Board members**

Fred Garner – President  
Claudus Birdsong – Vice-President  
Harold Smith – Treasurer  
Buddy Sebelist – Secretary  
Manny Dalis – Member  
David Durrence – Member  
Dick Faulk – member  
Ginny Faulk – Member  
Georgia Lavarney – Member  
Paul Pape – Member  
Linzy Rolland – Member  
Wayne Turner - Member

### **Leah Fire Department – 6 Board members**

Brice Reynolds – President  
Richard Costello, II – Vice President  
Jack Hayes – Member  
Frank Lanier – Member  
Dan Harrell – Member  
Bill Nogel – Member

### **Winfield Fire Department – 12 Board members**

Gordon Sparks – President  
Patrick Barger – Vice President  
Barbara Smoak – Treasurer  
Mrs. Jenna Thomas-McKie – Secretary  
Harold Cummings - Member  
Danny Agerton – Member  
Bill Luken – Member  
R. C. Thomas – Member  
Philip Wilson - Member  
Mary Maddox – Member  
Jim Scott - Member  
1 Vacancy

# DRAFT

## Water Services

The most heavily urbanized areas of the County are serviced by water mains with fire hydrants. The process of increasing water services throughout the County is an ongoing project.

Illustration 3.B is the most recently public indicator of the Water Service Area in Columbia County. The areas that are not currently provided with water mains are primarily located in the western parts of the County. Fire hydrants need to be inspected and serviced by the fire departments in conjunction with the Columbia County Water and Sewerage Department at least twice a year.

Since the previous fire study was conducted, water lines have been extended to Highway 150 to Terrance Drive in Winfield with funds from water customers. Also a 250,000 gallon elevated water tank was installed at Tom Bartles Road and Highway 150 in Winfield. This project was funded 50/50 by a Community Development Block Grant and Water Works funds. No property tax funds are used for the water system. Customers or users of the water system pay for its operation and capital improvements.

Previously, with assistance from the Central Savannah River Resource Conservation and Development Council and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, thirty-one dry fire hydrants were installed in Appling, Grovetown, Leah, and Winfield fire districts. These dry hydrants were intended to provide these fire departments with the ability to draw water out of lakes and ponds to fill their pumper trucks. Low water levels have left many of the dry hydrants completely out of the water sources at times.

The following is an update from the Chief's on the condition and status of these dry hydrants:

Grovetown Department of Public Safety – 5 out of 6 are in-service at this time. One of the hydrants was damaged during a vehicle accident, but a water line was installed on the other side of the road.

Appling Fire Department – There are 4 that are located in Appling are operational. Will check again and confirm.

Leah Fire Department – The 6 that are located in Leah that are operational. These are pumped and inspected twice each year.

Winfield Fire Department - No information was provided by Winfield.

# DRAFT

## **County Fire Marshal**

The Fire Marshal reviews plans and specifications for code compliance, inspects at the 80% and 100% stages of construction, and issues a Certificate of Occupancy for commercial construction in Grovetown and Harlem as well as the unincorporated County. The Fire Marshal also conducts annual inspections on certain buildings for compliance with codes.

To assist each fire service jurisdiction in the County, the Fire Marshal obtains plans on new construction for their training purposes, takes them on tours of the larger facilities for pre-planning, and answers their questions. Occasionally, the Fire Marshal is called to a fire scene for assistance and gives fire safety programs to County organizations.

## **Forestry Unit**

The mission statement for the Forestry Service is to enhance the quality of life for all the citizens of Georgia by providing leadership in the protection, management, and wise use of all forests. The responsibilities of the Forestry Unit in Columbia County include public assistance with wildfire protection, fire prevention activities, burning permits, seedlings, and technical advice with forest protection, reforestation, and management.

## **Coordination**

The Forestry Service adheres to the Concept of Operations as described in the EOP. In addition, the Forestry Service provides burn permits, forest health management assistance, cost sharing, tree farms, reforestation seedling sales, conservation education, forest projects utilization marketing and development, urban and community forestry, forest stewardship, water quality BMPs, forestland examinations, western fire assistance, disease control, and disaster emergency support.

## **Communications**

Because the Forestry Unit covers the entire county, good communications are a must. Radios are updated annually to take advantage of better technology. Calls are received by phone, pager, and radio from 9-1-1, fire departments, citizens, Sheriff Office, Fort Gordon, Air Patrol and the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) Dispatch.

## **Equipment**

Station Name and Address	Major Equipment	Year of Equipment	# of Paid Staff	# of Volunteer Staff
Georgia Forestry Commission 5887 Wrightsboro Road Harlem, GA 30814	2 Ford Pickup EC International transport Ford transport 2 JD 450G lift plows Jubilee farm tractor	2001 1993 1989 1993 & 1990 1953	3	0

# **DRAFT**

## Mutual Aid

The Forestry Service made the following requests to other fire departments for mutual aid during 2002:

1. GFC Richmond County – 16
2. GFC McDuffie County - 16

# DRAFT

## **Recommendations and Accomplishments from Previous Fire Services Study**

1. Recommendation to change the fire district lines for Martinez Engine Company 6, William Few Parkway, to reflect current service areas.

**Completed:** The district line was changed to include both sides of William Few parkway from Columbia Road to Washington Road and all road with access to said parkway.

2. Recommendation to change the fire district lines to reflect current service areas. Specifically, eliminate overlap between Harlem and Grovetown districts.

**Incomplete:** There is not record that this change was ever officially approved.

3. Recommendation to consider establishing a fully staff fire station in the Appling, Winfield, and Leah districts. A possible location for this station was listed as “Phinzy” due to its central location. Existing sub-stations should remain in place.

**Incomplete:** No action has been taken on this recommendation.

4. Recommendation to establish a full-time station in the Louisville/Wrightsboro area. Possible locations for this station include the Wrightsboro/Euchee Creek area near the Grovetown Middle School or the County-owned site at Louisville/Wrightsboro Roads.

**Incomplete:** No action has been taken on this recommendation.

5. Recommendation to encourage departments to increase training levels through the Georgia Public Safety Training Center and other education opportunities including the Columbia County Emergency Management Agency.

**Partially Completed:** The fire departments have different levels of participation in the training programs hosted and coordinated by EMA. The courses that have been made available, at no cost to the participants, include, incident response to terrorist bombings, vehicle extrication, rescue specialist, incident command, hazardous materials, infection control, weapons of mass destruction, biological agents, WIPP courses in handling an incident involving a radiological accident, exercise evaluation training.

**The following is a breakdown of fire department participation in 2001 and 2002:**  
(Some of these personnel volunteer in other departments.)

## DRAFT

Department	Number of Participants Completing Training in EMA Sponsored Courses in 2001	Number of Participants Completing Training in EMA Sponsored Courses in 2002
Martinez Fire Department	83	75
Grovetown DPS	27	22
Appling Fire Department	9	18
Leah Fire Department	5	4
Harlem Fire Department	5	3
Winfield Fire Department	0	0

6. Recommendation to establish a central training facility for all fire and emergency responder services. A possible location is the County Facility on Columbia Road adjacent to the Sheriff's training Center. This facility could include an Emergency Vehicle Operations Course and other specialized training facilities.

**Incomplete: No action has been taken on this recommendation.**

7. Recommendation to support fire service personnel with non-emergency County employees for first aid, firefighting, and hazardous material response.

**Completed: The Columbia County Water Department has established a chlorine incident response team, which assists countywide for hazardous material identification, control, and equipment assistance. Additionally, County employees have been trained in first aid, CPR, and AED utilization.**

8. Recommendation to purchase a back-up radio communication system to assist Leah, Appling, and Winfield and provide additional training of 9-1-1 dispatchers in fire service operations and/or the addition of fire service personnel to the 9-1-1 Center.

**Partially Completed: A radio repeater was purchased, installed and is maintained by the County EMA office. This has improved communications, but a more sophisticated radio system is needed Countywide in the near future for all departments to have the capability of talking to each other, across departmental lines.**

**However, there are no specific fire service operations training provided for 9-1-1 dispatchers and there is no dedicated fire service dispatcher in the 9-1-1 Center. Dispatchers are primarily law enforcement trained.**

9. Recommendation to continue expanding water service to all portions of the County as fund permit with the Water System budget.

## **DRAFT**

**Ongoing:** Since the previous fire services was conducted, the Water Department has extended water lines to Highway 150 to Terrance Drive in Winfield, using funds from water customers. Also, a 250,000 gallon elevated water tank was installed at Tom Bartles Road and Highway 150 in Winfield. This project was funded 50/50 by a Community Development Block Grant and Water Works funds. No property tax funds are used for the water system.

10. Recommendation that the subscription and tax alternatives should be presented to the County Commission, the elected officials of Harlem and Grovetown, and the Fire District Board of Directors. If the tax alternative is selected by the above individuals, then it is recommended at the citizens within each fire district be allowed to vote on the referendum.

**Incomplete: No action has been taken on this recommendation.**

11. Recommendation that is tax alternative is accepted, that a referendum be presented to the citizens during the November 1998 general election by fire district to save costs associated with a special election.

**This was not applicable.**

12. Recommendation that upon approval of referendum, the County enters into a contract with the existing services.

**This was not applicable.**

13. Recommendation Commissioners, municipal authorities and the Fire Boards evaluate and resolve all concerns outlined in the previous fire study prior to proceeding with the tax alternative.

**This was not applicable.**

**DRAFT**

## **DRAFT**

### **4. COMPARISON OF SUBSCRIPTION AND TAX ALTERNATIVES**

The 1997 *Columbia County Fire Services Study* examined two options for funding fire services through a dedicated property tax millage rate. One proposal was to have the tax applied only to the unincorporated areas of the County. The second option was to have a millage rate applied county-wide including the cities of Grovetown and Harlem.

If property taxes are applied only to the unincorporated area, then a referendum is required by State law since a special tax district would be created. If property taxes are applied county-wide, a referendum is not required. However, negotiations and an eventual intergovernmental agreement between the County and the two municipalities would be required to provide for the distribution of tax revenues for fire services within the city limits of Grovetown and Harlem.

In discussions with Commissioners and County staff, the preferred option by the County would be to have a dedicated millage rate applied county-wide **IF** the property tax option is selected. Based on that preference, only the county-wide option will be compared to the current subscription system now employed throughout the unincorporated areas of the County.

#### **Subscription Billing**

The subscription fee program has been in place within the unincorporated area of Columbia County for many years. Fire departments and their governing boards determine the annual fee for fire services based on the fair market value of property as reflected in the Columbia County Tax Digest. For example, the Appling Fire Department charged \$1 per \$1,000 in value in establishing their subscriber rate. Hence, a \$50,000 home would pay a \$50 fee for service each year. A minimum and/or maximum dollar amount may also be established within a fire district by the governing board.

The fire department bills its subscribers via mail utilizing a bill statement during the February - March time frame with a payment being received from property owners in April – June. The amount of money actually received from property owners by the fire district varies from year to year for a variety of reasons. Fire departments indicated a high of 89 percent collection rate to a low of 50 percent. Most departments send second notices to subscribers in an attempt to maximize their collections. In addition, most fire departments use alternative fund raising efforts to help with annual equipment needs. It is estimated that the cost of preparing, mailing, and processing fire subscription bills amounts to more than \$30,000 per year for fire districts in the County.

Since the current subscription billing system is based on a calendar year schedule, replacing it with a property tax system would require using a calendar year schedule initially to provide a consistent flow of revenue. For example, if the property tax alternative is selected, it would be best to begin it in January similar to the start of the current subscription billing year.

## **DRAFT**

### **Comparison of Subscription and Tax Alternatives**

Illustration 4.A compares potential revenues from the current subscription system with revenues from a county-wide millage rate of 1.62 and 2.00 mills. The 1.62 millage rate was selected because it was the minimum rate possible to maintain funding for the County's largest fire department, Martinez, using the value of property within that district. The 1.62 option also considers using future SPLOST for capital items as will be described in the last topic of section 6 of this study. Through use of SPLOST funds, annual capital expenses of \$900,000 - \$1,000,000 could be eliminated from property tax supported fire operations thus reducing property tax requirements by about 20 percent.

The 2.00 mill rate was selected to permit easier calculation of cost comparisons between subscription fees and property taxes. This millage rate produces enough money to cover projected personnel, operational, and capital expenses.

Column 2 lists each fire district and shows the current subscription rates which range from a low of \$1.00 per \$1,000 value of structures in Appling and Winfield to \$1.35 per \$1,000 value in the Martinez-Evans district.

Column 3 shows the potential revenue for each district if 100 percent of subscription fees are collected. The total maximum subscription revenue from all departments amounts to \$3,946,231. Please note that municipal taxes are used to support fire services within the city limits of both Grovetown and Harlem. Subscription rates are used in the portion of the municipal fire districts located in the unincorporated areas of the County. Data from Winfield was not available.

Column 4 shows the actual amount of subscription revenue collected. The total collected in 2002 amounted to \$3,353,082 or 84.9 percent of the potential revenue of \$3,946,231.

Column 5 indicated the percentage of subscriptions collected for each district. The range in collections goes from a low of 48.8 percent in the unincorporated Harlem district to 88.1 percent in the Martinez-Evans fire district.

One of the disadvantages of the subscription system for fire services is the difficulty and cost associated with collecting the fees. A tax system, on the other hand, eliminates the extra costs associated with preparing, sending, and processing bills since it is incorporated with the existing tax billing system. The cost of subscription billing is estimated more than \$30,000 per year.

Column 6 outlines the subscription budget for 2003 from each department submitting information.

Column 7 provides the 40 percent property value that would be used in doing a tax calculation. Taxable property values range from a low of \$58.8 million in the Leah district to a high of \$1.86 billion in the Martinez-Evans district. Vehicles and other personal property are distributed to each district based on the percentage of real property in each district.

## **DRAFT**

Column 8 indicates the percentage of total real property value in each of the fire districts. Leah has 2.36 percent of the total value while Martinez-Evans has almost 75 percent of all of the real property value in the County.

Columns 9 and 10 show the anticipated revenue from both 1.62 and 2.00 mill rates. In addition to the real property tax values, vehicles, motor homes, and other personal property are added to each district based on the percentage of value shown in column 8. Since the State now processes all vehicle taxes, the County no longer has records of vehicles based on fire district boundaries.

The bottom line collection rate for a 1.62 mill fire tax is \$4,017,144 while a 2.00 mill fire tax is \$4,959,438 based on the current tax digest figures. These millage rates are used for comparison purposes only in this study. If the Commission decides to utilize a property for fire protection, a more detailed study of needs will have to be done to determine the exact amount of funds required. The potential use of tax funds is outlined in the next section of the report.

## FIRE DEPARTMENT BUDGETS

**Illustration 4.A**

1 DISTRICT NUMBER	2 DISTRICT	3 SUBSCRIPTION POTENTIAL 2002 REVENUE	4 SUBSCRIPTION ACTUAL 2002 REVENUE	5 % 2002 SUBSCRIPTION COLLECTED AS REPORTED BY FIRE DEPTS	6 PROJECTED 2003 BUDGET	7 40% VALUE – 2002 (NOT INCLUDING EXEMPT PROPERTY)	8 % OF TOTAL VALUE	9 PROJECTED 2002 REVENUES USING 1.62 MILLAGE RATE	10 PROJECTED 2002 REVENUES USING 2.00 MILLAGE RATE
1	Harlem: City County (rural) \$1.10 per \$1,000 value	\$ 44,175 taxes \$ <u>133,272</u> fees \$ <b>177,447</b>	\$ 44,175 taxes \$ <u>65,000</u> fees \$ <b>109,175</b>	48.8%	NA	\$ 24,124,447 (City prop) \$ 74,226,298 (County prop) \$ <u>13,023,682</u> (Vehicles) \$ <b>111,374,427</b>	1.00%   4.49%	\$180,427	\$222,749
2	Grovetown: City County (rural) \$1.20 per \$1,000 value	\$ 34,701 taxes \$ <u>169,154</u> \$ <b>203,855</b>	\$ 34,701 taxes \$ <u>110,478</u> fees \$ <b>145,179</b>	65.3%	NA	\$ 57,490,050 (City prop) \$179,715,221 (County prop) \$ <u>31,738,148</u> (Vehicles) \$ <b>268,943,419</b>	2.32%  10.85%	\$435,688	\$537,887
3	Appling \$1.00 per \$1,000 value	\$ <b>109,754</b>	\$ 79,911 fees \$ <u>7,848</u> other \$ <b>87,759</b>	72.8%	\$80,000	\$127,390,316 (County prop) \$ <u>16,307,915</u> (Vehicles) \$ <b>143,698,231</b>	  5.79%	\$232,791	\$287,396
4	Leah \$1.25 per \$1,000 value	\$ <b>90,000</b>	\$ 63,040 fees \$ <u>6,589</u> other \$ <b>69,629</b>	70%	\$70,000	\$ 52,154,933 (County prop) \$ <u>6,681,715</u> (Vehicles) \$ <b>58,836,648</b>	 2.37%	\$95,315	\$117,673
5	Winfield \$1.00 per \$1,000 value	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$ 27,653,787 (County prop) \$ <u>3,539,045</u> (Vehicles) \$ <b>31,192,832</b>	 1.26%	\$50,532	\$62,386
6	Martinez-Evans \$1.35 per \$1,000 value	\$ <b>3,444,051</b>	\$3,034,653 fees \$ <u>126,581</u> other \$ <b>3,161,234</b>	88.1%	\$3,522,000	\$1,653,840,316 (County prop) \$ <u>211,833,025</u> (Vehicles) \$ <b>1,865,673,341</b>	 75.24%	\$3,022,391	\$3,731,347
<b>TOTALS</b>		\$3,946,231 (sub) \$ <u>78,876</u> (other) \$ <b>4,025,107</b>	\$3,353,082 (sub) \$ <u>219,894</u> (other) \$ <b>3,572,976</b>	<b>84.9%</b>		<b>\$2,479,718,898</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$4,017,144</b>	<b>\$4,959,438</b>

## **DRAFT**

### **Subscription Costs Versus Tax**

Illustrations 4.B compares the cost of subscription fees to the property tax alternative for home and land valued at \$127,485 in the County fire districts. The property tax alternative is a lower cost option for all districts when using a 1.62 mill rate. Bottom line savings range from \$13.57 in Appling and Winfield to \$44.34 in Martinez when considering income tax savings. Please note in this property tax alternative that improvements, land, and vehicles are used to compute the tax while in the subscription example, only the value of improvements is used.

When using a 2.00 mill property tax, savings are also shown in all districts except Appling and Winfield when compared to subscription fees. Note that Appling and Winfield have the lowest subscription charge per \$1000 of value for improvements. When using projected income tax savings, the 2.00 mill rate ranges from savings of \$26.90 in Martinez to costing \$3.87 more in Appling and Winfield.

# COMPARISON OF SUBSCRIPTION AND PROPERTY TAX FOR ACTUAL HOME IN COLUMBIA COUNTY

## Illustration 4.B

**HOME AND IMPROVEMENTS (SUBSCRIPTION VALUE)** = **\$87,915**  
**LAND** = **\$20,320**  
**VEHICLES** = **\$19,250**  
**\$127,485 x 40% = \$50,994 TOTAL TAXABLE PROPERTY VALUE**

	FIRE DISTRICTS					
	Appling	Grovetown Unincorporated	Harlem Unincorporated	Leah	Martinez-Evans	Winfield
Subscription rate per \$1000 value of structure and improvements	\$1.00	\$1.20	\$1.10	\$1.25	\$1.35	\$1.00
2003 Subscription fee for \$87,915 of improvements	\$87.92	\$105.50	\$96.71	\$109.89	\$118.69	\$87.92
1.62 mill property tax for \$50,994 total taxable property value (i.e.; home, land, and vehicles)	\$82.61	\$82.61	\$82.61	\$82.61	\$82.61	\$82.61
2.0 mill property tax for \$50,994 total taxable property value (i.e.; home, land, and vehicles)	\$101.99	\$101.99	\$101.99	\$101.99	\$101.99	\$101.99
Variance between subscription and property tax	1.62 mill = (\$5.31) 2.0 mill = \$14.07	1.62 mill = (\$22.89) 2.0 mill = \$3.51	1.62 mill = (\$14.10) 2.0 mill = \$5.28	1.62 mill = (\$27.28) 2.0 mill = (\$7.90)	1.62 mill = (\$36.08) 2.0 mill = (\$16.70)	1.62 mill = (\$5.31) 2.0 mill = \$14.07
Estimated income tax savings range based on minimum of 10% tax bracket (an individual's tax bracket could be a maximum of 38.6%)	1.62 mill = (\$8.26) 2.0 mill = (\$10.20)	1.62 mill = (\$8.26) 2.0 mill = (\$10.20)	1.62 mill = (\$8.26) 2.0 mill = (\$10.20)	1.62 mill = (\$8.26) 2.0 mill = (\$10.20)	1.62 mill = (\$8.26) 2.0 mill = (\$10.20)	1.62 mill = (\$8.26) 2.0 mill = (\$10.20)
Total variance between subscription and property tax (including income tax savings using 10% tax bracket). Tax savings assume filing itemized deductions.	1.62 mill = (\$13.57) 2.0 mill = \$3.87	1.62 mill = (\$31.15) 2.0 mill = (\$6.69)	1.62 mill = (\$22.36) 2.0 mill = (\$4.92)	1.62 mill = (\$35.54) 2.0 mill = (\$18.10)	1.62 mill = (\$44.34) 2.0 mill = (\$26.90)	1.62 mill = (\$13.57) 2.0 mill = \$3.87

## **DRAFT**

Illustration 4.C compares the cost of subscription fees to the property taxes for a home, land, and vehicles valued at \$170,793. Bottom line savings for the 1.62 mill property tax alternative range from \$28.67 to \$73.56 when using income tax savings. Even the 2.00 mill option shows total savings from \$5.30 in Appling and Winfield to \$50.19 in Martinez.

Illustration 4.D compares subscription fees to property taxes for a home, land, and vehicles valued at \$271,021. Bottom line savings for the 1.62 mill property tax alternative range from \$19.58 in Appling and Winfield to \$81.76 in Martinez. For the 2.00 mill property tax alternatives, savings are shown in all fire districts except Appling and Winfield.

# COMPARISON OF SUBSCRIPTION AND PROPERTY TAX FOR ACTUAL HOME IN COLUMBIA COUNTY

Illustration 4.C

**HOME AND IMPROVEMENTS VALUE (SUBSCRIPTION VALUE)** = **\$128,266**  
**LAND VALUE** = **\$ 23,361**  
**VEHICLES** = **\$ 19,166**  
**\$170,793 x 40% = \$68,317 TOTAL PROPERTY VALUE**

	FIRE DISTRICTS					
	Appling	Grovetown Unincorporated	Harlem Unincorporated	Leah	Martinez-Evans	Winfield
Subscription rate per \$1000 value of structure and improvements	\$1.00	\$1.20	\$1.10	\$1.25	\$1.35	\$1.00
2003 Subscription fee for \$128,266 of improvements	\$128.27	\$153.92	\$141.09	\$160.33	\$173.16	\$128.27
1.62 mill property tax for \$170,793 home, land, and vehicles (40% Tax value of \$68,317 x .00162)	\$110.67	\$110.67	\$110.67	\$110.67	\$110.67	\$110.67
2.0 mill property tax for \$170,793 home, land, and vehicles (40% Tax value of \$68,317 x .002)	\$136.63	\$136.63	\$136.63	\$136.63	\$136.63	\$136.63
Variance between subscription and property tax	1.62 mill = (\$17.60) 2.0 mill = \$8.36	1.62 mill = (\$43.25) 2.0 mill = (\$17.29)	1.62 mill = (\$30.42) 2.0 mill = (\$4.46)	1.62 mill = (\$49.66) 2.0 mill = (\$23.70)	1.62 mill = (\$62.49) 2.0 mill = (\$36.53)	1.62 mill = (\$17.60) 2.0 mill = \$8.36
Estimated income tax savings range based on minimum of 10% tax bracket (an individual's tax bracket could be a maximum of 38.6%)	1.62 mill = (\$11.07) 2.0 mill = (\$13.66)	1.62 mill = (\$11.07) 2.0 mill = (\$13.66)	1.62 mill = (\$11.07) 2.0 mill = (\$13.66)	1.62 mill = (\$11.07) 2.0 mill = (\$13.66)	1.62 mill = (\$11.07) 2.0 mill = (\$13.66)	1.62 mill = (\$11.07) 2.0 mill = (\$13.66)
Total variance between subscription and property tax (including income tax savings using 10% tax bracket). Tax savings assume filing itemized deductions.	1.62 mill = (\$28.67) 2.0 mill = (\$5.30)	1.62 mill = (\$54.32) 2.0 mill = (\$30.95)	1.62 mill = (\$41.49) 2.0 mill = (\$18.12)	1.62 mill = (\$60.73) 2.0 mill = (\$37.36)	1.62 mill = (\$73.56) 2.0 mill = (\$50.19)	1.62 mill = (\$28.67) 2.0 mill = (\$5.30)

# COMPARISON OF SUBSCRIPTION AND PROPERTY TAX FOR ACTUAL HOME IN COLUMBIA COUNTY

## ILLUSTRATION 4.D

<b>HOME AND IMPROVEMENTS (SUBSCRIPTION VALUE)</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>\$177,642</b>	
<b>LAND</b>	<b>= \$</b>	<b>30,879</b>	
<b>VEHICLES</b>	<b>= \$</b>	<b><u>62,500</u></b>	
	<b>\$ 271,021</b>	<b>x 40%</b>	<b>= \$108,408    TOTAL TAXABLE PROPERTY VALUE</b>

	FIRE DISTRICTS					
	Appling	Grovetown Unincorporated	Harlem Unincorporated	Leah	Martinez-Evans	Winfield
Subscription rate per \$1000 value of structure and improvements	\$1.00	\$1.20	\$1.10	\$1.25	\$1.35	\$1.00
2003 Subscription fee for \$177,642 of improvements	\$177.64	\$213.17	\$195.41	\$222.05	\$239.82	\$177.64
1.62 mill property tax for \$271,021 total taxable property value (i.e.; home, land, and vehicles) (40% value \$108,408 x .00162)	\$175.62	\$175.62	\$175.62	\$175.62	\$175.62	\$175.62
2.0 mill property tax for \$271,021 total taxable property value (i.e.; home, land, and vehicles) ) (40% value \$108,408 x .002)	\$216.82	\$216.82	\$216.82	\$216.82	\$216.82	\$216.82
Variance between subscription and property tax	1.62 mill = (\$2.02) 2.0 mill = \$39.18	1.62 mill = (\$37.55) 2.0 mill = \$3.65	1.62 mill = (\$19.79) 2.0 mill = \$21.41	1.62 mill = (\$46.43) 2.0 mill = (\$5.23)	1.62 mill = (\$64.20) 2.0 mill = (\$23.00)	1.62 mill = (\$2.02) 2.0 mill = \$39.18
Estimated income tax savings range based on minimum of 10% tax bracket (an individual's tax bracket could be a maximum of 38.6%)	1.62 mill = (\$17.56) 2.0 mill = (\$21.68)	1.62 mill = (\$17.56) 2.0 mill = (\$21.68)	1.62 mill = (\$17.56) 2.0 mill = (\$21.68)	1.62 mill = (\$17.56) 2.0 mill = (\$21.68)	1.62 mill = (\$17.56) 2.0 mill = (\$21.68)	1.62 mill = (\$17.56) 2.0 mill = (\$21.68)
Total variance between subscription and property tax (including income tax savings using 10% tax bracket). Tax savings assume filing itemized deductions.	1.62 mill = (\$19.58) 2.0 mill = \$17.50	1.62 mill = (\$55.11) 2.0 mill = (\$18.03)	1.62 mill = (\$37.35) 2.0 mill = (\$0.27)	1.62 mill = (\$63.99) 2.0 mill = (\$26.91)	1.62 mill = (\$81.76) 2.0 mill = (\$44.68)	1.62 mill = (\$19.58) 2.0 mill = \$17.50



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Illustration 4.E compares the cost of subscription fees to property tax for a business in Columbia County valued at \$482,172. Savings totaled \$77.00 in Martinez while costing \$15.86 more in Appling and Winfield. For the 2.00 mill property tax, savings of \$11.03 were recorded in Martinez while the cost was higher in all other districts. Reduced savings resulted from the high percentage of land value to total property value. Land is not charged in the subscription alternative while it is in the property tax option.

Finally, Illustration 4.F compares subscription fees to property taxes for vacant land valued at \$425,317. Since undeveloped land is not charged a subscription fee, there is a substantial increase in cost to the property owner of \$620.11 for \$1.62 mills and \$765.57 for the 2.00 mill alternative.

# COMPARISON OF SUBSCRIPTION AND PROPERTY TAX FOR ACTUAL BUSINESS IN COLUMBIA COUNTY

## ILLUSTRATION 4.E

**BUILDING AND IMPROVEMENTS (SUBSCRIPTION VALUE) = \$265,335**  
**LAND = \$216,837**  
**\$482,172 x 40% = \$192,869 TOTAL TAXABLE PROPERTY VALUE**

	FIRE DISTRICTS					
	Appling	Grovetown Unincorporated	Harlem Unincorporated	Leah	Martinez-Evans	Winfield
Subscription rate per \$1000 value of structure and improvements	\$1.00	\$1.20	\$1.10	\$1.25	\$1.35	\$1.00
2003 Subscription fee for \$265,335 of improvements	\$265.34	\$318.40	\$291.87	\$331.67	\$358.20	\$265.34
1.62 mill property tax for \$482,172 commercial building and land	\$312.45	\$312.45	\$312.45	\$312.45	\$312.45	\$312.45
2.0 mill property tax for \$482,172 commercial building and land	\$385.74	\$385.74	\$385.74	\$385.74	\$385.74	\$385.74
Variance between subscription and property tax	1.62 mill = \$47.11 2.0 mill = \$120.40	1.62 mill = (\$5.95) 2.0 mill = \$67.34	1.62 mill = \$20.58 2.0 mill = \$93.87	1.62 mill = (\$19.22) 2.0 mill = \$54.07	1.62 mill = (\$45.75) 2.0 mill = \$27.54	1.62 mill = \$47.11 2.0 mill = \$120.40
Estimated income tax savings range based on minimum of 10% tax bracket (an individual's tax bracket could be a maximum of 38.6%)	1.62 mill = (\$31.25) 2.0 mill = (\$38.57)	1.62 mill = (\$31.25) 2.0 mill = (\$38.57)	1.62 mill = (\$31.25) 2.0 mill = (\$38.57)	1.62 mill = (\$31.25) 2.0 mill = (\$38.57)	1.62 mill = (\$31.25) 2.0 mill = (\$38.57)	1.62 mill = (\$31.25) 2.0 mill = (\$38.57)
Total variance between subscription and property tax (including income tax savings using 10% tax bracket). Tax savings assume filing itemized deductions.	1.62 mill = \$15.86 2.0 mill = \$81.83	1.62 mill = (\$37.20) 2.0 mill = \$28.77	1.62 mill = (\$10.67) 2.0 mill = 55.30	1.62 mill = (\$50.47) 2.0 mill = \$15.50	1.62 mill = (\$77.00) 2.0 mill = (\$11.03)	1.62 mill = \$15.86 2.0 mill = \$81.83



## COMPARISON OF SUBSCRIPTION AND PROPERTY TAX FOR ACTUAL VACANT LAND IN COLUMBIA COUNTY

### ILLUSTRATION 4.F

**LAND = \$1,063,292 X 40% = \$425,317 TOTAL TAXABLE PROPERTY VALUE**

[illegible]

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## 5. PROPOSED USE OF PROPERTY TAX FUNDS

If the property tax alternative is selected by the Commission after reviewing this matter with each fire district, Grovetown, Harlem, and the citizens of the County, a tentative budget is outlined for discussion purposes only.

### Distribution of Funds Based on Fire Districts

Table 5.A compares each fire district by population, area, and property value. A proposed distribution of property tax revenue is shown using the percentage of property value in each district since that is the source of the tax revenue. However, the population and service area could also be considered in a final distribution of funds formula.

### COMPARISON OF FIRE DISTRICTS BY POPULATION, AREA, PROPERTY VALUE, AND PROPOSED DISTRIBUTION OF PROPERTY TAX FUNDS

**Illustration 5.A**

Number/District	Population	% of Total Population	Area in sq miles within district	% of Total Area	% of Property Value Criteria Selected for Distribution of Property Tax Funds	Potential Distribution of Funds Using % of Property Value for 2.00 Mill Fire Tax
1 Harlem City County	1,814 <u>5,232</u> 7,046	2.05% <u>5.93%</u> 7.98%	2.74 <u>43.17</u> 45.91	1.00% <u>15.63%</u> 16.63%	4.60%	\$222,749
2 Grovetown City County	6,089 <u>4,961</u> 11,050	6.90% <u>5.61%</u> 12.51%	3.47 <u>25.02</u> 28.49	1.26% <u>9.05%</u> 10.31%	11.21%	\$537,887
3 Appling	2,602	2.95%	58.43	21.15%	5.76%	\$287,396
4 Leah	2,424	2.75%	44.42	16.08%	2.36%	\$117,673
5 Winfield	1,536	1.74%	33.22	12.03%	1.25%	\$62,386
6 Martinez-Evans	63,630	72.07%	65.73	23.80%	74.82%	\$3,731,347
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>88,288</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>276.20</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>\$4,959,438</b>

## DRAFT

Illustration 5.B calculates the additional revenue for fire districts that could be generated using the property tax alternative of 2.00 mills county-wide. The individual fire district increases range from a low of \$46,386 in Winfield to a high of \$392,708 in the Grovetown district. The total increase for all districts is \$1,017,084. The 2.00 mill rate was selected for ease of calculations. The exact millage rate will have to be determined based on a detailed budget analysis. If SPLOST funds are used as is recommended later in this study, millage rates could be reduced to about 1.62 mills.

If the fire districts continue to operate independently from each other, some improvement in personnel, equipment, and stations could result from a needed increase in revenues. However, if districts were to combine their efforts by joining forces, significant improvement to service could result. For example, the 1997 *Columbia County Fire Services Study* recommended the following concerning joint ventures:

**Finding #3:** Appling, Winfield, and Leah Fire Departments routinely respond to fires in any of the three districts. All three departments currently utilize the same radio frequency. Appling, Winfield, and Leah do not have paid personnel on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**Recommendation:** Consider establishing a full staffed station in the Appling, Winfield, and Leah districts. Possible location for this station is Phinizy, due to its central location. Existing sub-stations should remain in place.

### COMPARISON OF TAX REVENUES TO CURRENT SUBSCRIPTION-BASED BUDGETS

**Illustration 5.B**

District	Potential Funds Available through 2 mill Tax	2003 Budget/ Budget Estimate	Variance Between Tax and Current Budgets	Combined Increase for Harlem-Grovetown and Appling, Leah & Winfield
Harlem City County		44,175 <del>65,000</del> \$109,175 Est.		Harlem and Grovetown  \$506,282
Grovetown City County	\$222,749	34,701 <del>110,478</del> \$145,179 Est.	\$113,574	
Appling	\$287,396	\$80,000	\$207,396	Appling, Leah & Winfield  \$301,455
Leah	\$117,673	\$70,000	\$47,673	
Winfield	\$62,386	\$16,000 Est.	\$46,386	
Martinez-Evans	\$3,731,347	\$3,522,000	\$209,347	\$209,347
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,959,438</b>	<b>\$3,942,354</b>	<b>\$1,017,084</b>	<b>\$1,017,084</b>

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If Appling, Leah, and Winfield were to utilize their combined increase of \$301,455 jointly, sufficient funds would almost be available to provide a fully staffed station with two firefighters 24/7. The estimated cost of staffing such an operation would be approximately \$345,000 based on information obtained from the Martinez Fire Department. It would take a one-year period to acquire a site, construct a station, and obtain equipment. In the second year, funds could be used to staff the new station. Savings in the elimination of costs associated with the subscription system could also help pay for a full-staffed station.

Another finding from the 1997 *Columbia County Fire Services Study* states:

Finding #4: South of I-20 in the unincorporated area of the Harlem Grovetown Fire Districts, the Wrightsboro/Louisville area is outside the five-mile coverage limit. In addition, there is no 24 hours a day, seven day a week station in this portion of the County.

Recommendation: A full-time station should be established in the Louisville/Wrightsboro area. Possible locations for this station include the Wrightsboro/Euchee Creek area near the proposed middle school or the County-owned site at Louisville/Wrightsboro Roads. Another possible site is the I-20 Interchange at Appling.

If Harlem and Grovetown were to utilize their combined increase of \$506,282 jointly, sufficient funds would be available to construct and fully staff a new station 24/7 over a two-year period. One year would be required to acquire land, construct a building, and obtain equipment. The second year would involve staffing the new station. Again, savings from the elimination of costs associated with the subscription system could also help pay for a fully-staffed station and other personnel needs such as 9-1-1 dispatch.

The estimated cost for constructing a station is \$500,000. Actual cost will depend on the number of bays, staffing requirements, and land.

A budget for the fire districts option is presented later in this section of the report.

### **Distribution of Funds Based on Budget Requirements**

Illustration 5.C reviews various distribution formulas for personnel, operation, and capital expenditures for fire departments from national information contained in the *Municipal Yearbook* and from experience in comparable Georgia counties. Since the most likely and most cost-effective solution for a County-funded fire service would be a combination department using a mixture of full-time and volunteer firefighters, the allocation of funds from comparable Georgia counties utilizing combination departments was selected for the purpose of this report.

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## COMPARISON OF DISTRIBUTION FORMULAS FOR PERSONNEL, OPERATION, AND CAPITAL BASED ON BENCHMARK COUNTIES, AND NATIONAL DATA

Illustration 5.C

	<b>Municipal Year Book</b>	<b>Comparable Counties</b>	<b>Proposed Distribution</b>	<b>Proposed Budget Amount</b>
Personnel	80%	64%	64%	\$3,174,040
Operating	13%	17%	17%	\$ 843,105
Capital	7%	19%	19%	\$ 942,293
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$4,959,438</b>

If the distribution of potential funds from a dedicated 2.00 mill tax was used in Columbia County a total of \$4,959,438 would be available. About \$3,174,000 could be used for personnel, \$843,000 for operating, and \$942,000 for capital expenditures using the percentage breakdown from comparable counties of 64%, 17%, and 19% respectively.

If future SPLOST funds were dedicated to capital fire protection needs, the millage requirement could be reduced by \$942,293 per year. The \$942,293 in property tax savings is equivalent to about .38 of a mill or 19% of the 2.00 mill rate. Thus, the millage could be reduced further from 2.00 to 1.62 mills.

SPLOST funds of \$942,293 for each of five years would be required to meet basic capital needs. Additional SPLOST funds would be needed to purchase existing equipment and/or stations if a consolidated or single fire service option is selected. Savings on property tax funds could also be used to supplement dispatch needs at 9-1-1.

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## Proposed Budget Alternatives

Based on a review of the options presented in the previous two topics in this section of the report, three budget alternatives are presented.

### 1. Existing Fire Districts

The first alternative is shown in Illustration 5.D. It shows how funds could be divided among fire departments using the distribution formula of comparable Georgia counties with combination departments with both full-time and volunteer firefighters. Because of the estimated cost (i.e., \$354,000) to staff a station with two firefighters 24/7, only the Grovetown and Martinez-Evans Departments could accommodate that level of improved service. Appling would be close to reaching the goal for 24/7 staffing. It is unlikely Leah and Winfield could staff stations with full-time firefighters on their own in the next ten years.

The revenue projection of \$4,959,438 is based on either a 2.00 mill tax or a 1.62 mill rate supplemented with the equivalent of .38 mills in SPLOST funds.

### DISTRIBUTION OF FIRE TAX FUNDS UTILIZING THE CURRENT FIRE DISTRICTS

Illustration 5.D

District	Potential Funds	Distribution Formula			
		Personnel 64%	Operation 17%	Capital 19%	Total 100%
Harlem City County Total	\$222,749	\$142,559	\$37,867	\$42,323	\$222,749
Grovetown City County Total	\$537,887	\$334,248	\$91,441	\$112,198	\$537,887
Appling	\$287,396	\$183,933	\$48,857	\$54,606	\$287,396
Leah	\$117,673	\$75,311	\$20,004	\$22,358	\$117,893
Winfield	\$62,386	\$39,927	\$10,606	\$11,853	\$62,386
Martinez-Evans	\$3,731,347	\$2,388,062	\$634,329	\$708,956	\$3,731,347
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,959,438</b>	<b>\$3,174,040</b>	<b>\$843,104</b>	<b>\$942,294</b>	<b>\$4,959,438</b>

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## 2. Partially Consolidated Fire Districts

The second alternative is shown in illustration 5.E. Through a consolidation of efforts in Grovetown-Harlem and the Appling-Leah-Winfield Fire Districts, enough funds are distributed to have one staffed station with two firefighters 24/7 in Grovetown-Harlem and almost enough for one fully-staffed station in the Appling-Leah-Winfield district. Martinez-Evans could support approximately one more fully-staffed station. All personnel calculations are based on an estimated expenditure of \$345,000 per station obtained from the Martinez Fire Department.

Again, the \$4,959,438 could be generated from either a 2.00 mills of property tax or a 1.62 mills of property tax and the equivalent amount of .38 mills from SPLOST.

### **DISTRIBUTION OF FIRE TAX FUNDS UTILIZING COMBINED DEPARTMENTS AS PROPOSED IN 1997 *COLUMBIA COUNTY FIRE SERVICES STUDY***

**Illustration 5.E**

District	Potential Funds	Distribution Formula			
		Personnel 64%	Operations 17%	Capital 19%	Total 100%
Grovetown-Harlem	\$760,636	\$486,807	\$129,308	\$144,521	<b>\$760,636</b>
Appling-Leah-Winfield	\$467,455	\$299,171	\$79,467	\$88,817	<b>\$467,455</b>
Martinez-Evans	\$3,731,347	\$2,388,062	\$634,329	\$708,956	<b>\$3,731,347</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$4,959,438</b>	<b>\$3,174,040</b>	<b>\$843,104</b>	<b>\$942,294</b>	<b>\$4,959,438</b>

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## 3. Fully-Consolidated Fire District

The third alternative is shown on Illustration 5.F. By consolidating all efforts into one fire service budget, \$3,174,040 would be available for personnel, \$843,104 for operations, and \$942,294 for capital requirements. A single entity would have the most resources, greatest flexibility, streamlined command and control, unified training, and simplified mutual aid.

As with law enforcement through the Sheriff's Office and emergency medical services through a County contract with Gold Cross, a single entity reduces management issues, unproductive jealousy, and predatory competition.

A single entity for fire protection could be accomplished either with a contract for service as is done with the emergency medical service or through a County department as is done through our Sheriff's Office. A fully consolidated County department would require additional study to compare employee benefits, etc. between the current fire departments and County employee benefits.

A County department also has the advantage of being exempt from State and local sales taxes. The subscription departments pay the 7% sales tax for all purchases. The 7% savings could amount to \$70,000 or more per year based on expenditures of \$1,000,000.

### DISTRIBUTION OF FIRE TAX FUNDS UTILIZING A SINGLE DEPARTMENT SERVING THE ENTIRE COUNTY

Illustration 5.F

District	Potential Funds	Distribution Formula			
		Personnel 64%	Operations 17%	Capital 19%	Total 100%
County-wide including municipalities through contract for service	\$4,959,438	\$3,174,040	\$843,104	\$942,294	\$4,959,438

## Conclusions

In conclusion, this section presented three budget examples of how fire service could be funded through collection of a property tax. Example one follows the current fire district system and does not offer the opportunity for the establishment of 24/7 stations in the more rural areas of the County. The second example following partial consolidation of districts to include Grovetown-Harlem, Appling-Leah-Winfield, and Martinez-Evans offers the opportunity for staffing stations 24/7 in the Grovetown-Harlem and Appling-Leah-Winfield districts. The third alternative has one entity for the entire County and has the potential for improved response and the greatest cost

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effectiveness. Alternative three also has the option of a contract for service or the establishment of a County fire department.

The current fire districts are shown on Illustration 3.A on page 3-3. The partially-consolidated fire districts are shown on Illustration 5-G. While the fully-consolidated district or single department alternative is shown on Illustration 5H.

These, as well as other options that may evolve, need to be discussed by policy makers and citizens. The ultimate decision reached by our elected County officials, municipal leaders, fire department directors, and the citizens will determine the future direction for fire service in Columbia County.

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## 6. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The concluding section of the *Columbia County Fire Services Study* discusses an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the current fire protection system and the opportunities and threats from projected conditions. Based on this analysis, specific findings and recommendations are enumerated to improve fire service in the County. Two timelines are developed to implement the recommendations. The compressed timeline moves implementation along as fast as possible. The expanded timeline is perhaps more realistic in carrying out suggested plans to improve fire service since it offers more time for decision making, negotiations, and contract approvals. Finally, an illustrated example of how a property tax for operations and SPLOST for capital fire services needs could be implemented in Columbia County is shown.

### **SWOT Analysis**

SWOT stands for STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, and THREATS. It is an effective management tool used to identify current strengths and weaknesses and projected opportunities and threats confronting an organization or service.

Definitions of key terms used in the SWOT analysis include the following:

Strengths are those current attributes that make an organization sound and thriving

Weaknesses are those current attributes that restrict an organization from functioning in a normal or above-average manner.

Opportunities are a combination of projected events or circumstances that arise which, if acted upon at a certain time, will result in a gain for an organization.

Threats are projected events that could result in harm to an organization.

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## SWOT ANALYSIS OF EXISTING COLUMBIA COUNTY FIRE SERVICES (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Weaknesses)

EXISTING CONDITIONS	PROJECTED CONDITIONS
<b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Low cost voluntary contribution for all fire service in Columbia County except incorporated areas of Grovetown and Harlem.</li></ul>	<b>Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop a unified fire service system with either consolidated districts or a single entity funded through property tax for operations and SPLOST for capital needs.</li></ul>
<b>Weaknesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All Georgia counties with more than 76,000 population have a county fire department except Columbia County.</li><li>• There is no County-wide master planning for fire service.</li><li>• There is no County-wide training facility or command structure for fire services.</li><li>• There is no uniform dispatch system for fire departments.</li><li>• Only Martinez and Grovetown have a substantial number of paid staff. Harlem has one full-time employee and Appling, Leah, and Winfield have no full-time employees.</li><li>• Current subscription collection rates range for 50% to 89%. The cost of collecting subscriptions reduces amount available for fire protection.</li><li>• Subscription fees are not tax deductible while property taxes are for homeowners.</li><li>• Only Martinez and Grovetown offer 24/7 staffed stations.</li><li>• Leah and Winfield will not have sufficient funds for staffed stations in the foreseeable future.</li><li>• Subscription fire departments pay 7% State and local sales tax while County fire service would be exempt from sales tax.</li></ul>	<b>Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limited all-hazards response to chemical incidents, bombings, and terrorism incidents under current volunteer fire system.</li><li>• Failure to collect adequate funds for subscription fire departments based on citizen preference or economic conditions.</li><li>• A lack of emergency management training such as Hazmat, rescue specialist, extrication, infection control, etc. for all fire departments.</li></ul>

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## **Findings and Recommendations**

After completing this Fire Study update, County Administrator Steve Szablewski and Emergency Services Division Director Pam Tucker met to review the study's findings and to make recommendations to improve fire services in the County.

With the distribution of this Draft Study and after discussions with municipalities, fire Departments, County officials and staff, and, most importantly, citizens, a Final Study will be prepared.

### **1. Finding – Special Recognition**

County citizens owe a great deal to the subscription fire departments that provide services in the unincorporated areas of the County. Without help from County government except for 9-1-1, Fire Marshal, Water Services, Hazmat, Emergency Management, Forestry Service, and Emergency Medical, the subscription fire departments offered the only type of fire service available in a rural county transitioning to a more-densely populated suburban county.

#### **Recommendation**

Recognize the leadership, service, and dedication of subscription fire departments serving the County. A possible location for such recognition could be at a future County fire training facility or at the Columbia Memorial Gardens to be constructed adjacent to the new library. The monument could be part of a capital improvement project.

Study references to this recommendation are in Section 3 where the contributions of the existing fire services are outlined.

### **2. Finding – Kind of Fire Service**

Unincorporated County citizens are currently served by six fire services (i.e., Martinez, Grovetown, Harlem, Appling, Leah, and Winfield). Coordination, training, cooperation, and mutual aid are complicated by the number and diversity of departments in Columbia County.

#### **Recommendation**

Partially or fully consolidated fire service operations to improve effectiveness, efficiency, and reduce cost. The options available include the following:

- a.) Leave the current fire service operations as they are with six departments serving the unincorporated area of the County.

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- b.) Partial consolidation of Grovetown-Harlem and Appling-Leah-Winfield districts to provide enough funds to support staffed stations as shown in Illustration 5.G on page 5-9.
- c.) Fully consolidate all firefighting efforts into a single fire service either through contract for service or the establishment of a County fire department as shown in Illustration 5.H on page 5-10.

The ultimate type of fire service for the County would be option 2.c outlined above with a single fire service for the County.

To achieve this option, a transition period with contracts to existing departments for a year or more may be needed before the ultimate objective of a single fire service is attained.

Study references to option 2.b and 2.c are in Section 2, 3, and 5.

### **3. Finding – Organizational Structure of Fire Department**

A combination fire department with both paid and volunteer firefighters offers the most economical solution for providing 24/7 fire protection in the County. By using benchmark counties with similar 2000 populations to Columbia County (e.g., Bartow – population 76,019, Coweta – population 89,215, and Fayette-population 91, 263), information on operating a combination county department can be obtained. Columbia County’s 2000 population was 89,288.

#### **Recommendation**

Establish a combination fire department with enough paid, full-time firefighters to provide 24/7 coverage at the minimum number of stations needed to serve the County. Full-time firefighters would be supplemented with volunteers as needed on nights and weekends.

Study references to this recommendation are in Section 2.

### **4. Finding – Property Tax Advantages**

A property tax alternative is more cost-effective to those who currently subscribe for fire services than the subscription system.

#### **Recommendation**

Implement property tax alternative following either compressed or expanded timelines described later in this section. The tax alternative could apply to current districts, partially consolidated districts, or to a single fire service as outlined in Finding 2.

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Study references to this recommendation are in Section 2, pages 2-11 and 2-12 and all of Sections 4 and 5.

## **5. Finding – SPLOST for Capital Needs**

The use of Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds could reduce capital needs for stations and equipment by at least \$1,000,000 per year or the equivalent of .4 mills once and if the SPLOST tax is passed. The proposed millage rate for fire service could be reduced from 2.00 mills to 1.6 mills or a 20% millage reduction.

### **Recommendation**

Move to complete agreements with fire departments and prepare information for SPLOST referendum to include new stations, new equipment, acquisition of existing equipment, and payment of fire department debt if single fire service alternative is approved. Proceeds from acquisition could be distributed to fire departments and, in turn, to subscribers that previously paid for capital fire facilities and equipment.

If stations and equipment must be purchased through creations of a single fire service, more SPLOST funds would be required than the \$1,000,000 per year for five years previously discussed. The amount of SPLOST funds required to purchase existing equipment and facilities would have to be studied as part of the future SPLOST referendum. Use of SPLOST funds for capital improvements also saves 7% in State and local sales taxes.

Through use of a general obligation bond with passage of the SPLOST referendum, funds for fire services could be available shortly after passage of the referendum.

Fire service capital needs should also be coordinated with other projects for law enforcement, water, communications, training, etc.

Study references to this recommendation are in Section 2, pages 2-11 and 2-12 and Section 5.

## **6. Finding – Legal Basis for County Fire Service**

In Georgia, both the constitution and legislative enactment authorize the establishment and operation of a county fire department as proposed in Recommendation 2.c. In addition, contracting with an entity to provide fire services is authorized, and the County has the authority to create fire districts. Finally, the County has the authority to set a county-wide millage rate to operate a

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fire department or service and to propose a referendum to fund capital expenditures through a SPLOST program.

### **Recommendation**

Once and if a decision is reached on (1) the kind of fire service, (2) the organizational structure of a fire service, and (3) the type of funding for operational and capital needs, the County needs to consult with the County Attorney to ensure compliance with Georgia constitutional and legislative requirements.

Study references for this recommendation are in Section 2, pages 2-11 and 2-12 and Section 4.

### **7. Finding - Fire Master Plan**

A fire master plan for Columbia County would help guide improvements in fire service efficiency by identifying current resources, number and location of needed facilities and equipment, minimum water system requirements, and communication systems needed to conduct fire and emergency operations. A master plan would also assist policy makers deciding on when and how to implement operational improvements, the procurement of equipment, construction of facilities, and communication services. Finally, a master plan would be a resource for preparing future budgets.

### **Recommendation**

Using this *Columbia County Fire Services Study Update* as a resource, prepare a master plan once and if decisions are made on the study recommendation.

Study references to this recommendation are in Section 2, page 2-2 and all of Section 3.

### **8. Improved Training**

Columbia County currently provides a substantial portion of the requirement for or to assist fire protection in the unincorporated area of the County such as 9-1-1 response, fire marshal, water service, Hazmat response, emergency management, forestry service, emergency medical services, and the Sheriff's Office law enforcement. A unified and comprehensive training program combining all aspects of public safety operations would improve the effectiveness and response of a fire protection program.

# **DRAFT**

## **Recommendation**

Develop a County-initiated training system to improve fire services. A training facility for firefighters and related public safety operations could be a future capital project under the SPLOST program. Possible location for such a training facility is the County landfill once it closes operations in two years.

Study references to this recommendation are in Section 2, page 2-3 and all of Section 3.

## **9. Finding – Contracts**

If fire operations are partially or full consolidated as outlined in Recommendation 2, then contracts or intergovernmental agreements would have to be prepared between Columbia County and the municipalities of Grovetown and Harlem. In addition, agreements would have to be prepared for service and/or changes to district boundaries with the department serving the unincorporated areas of the County.

## **Recommendation**

Based on decisions reached on the previous recommendations, prepare agreements and contracts with municipalities and departments. In addition, memorandums of understanding will be needed with 9-1-1, emergency services, forestry service, emergency medical service, management services, water services, and others to implement changes to fire operations.

Study references to this recommendation are in Section 2, pages 2-11 and 2-12; all of Section 3; and Section 5.

## **10. Finding – Management Requirements**

If recommendations are carried out as proposed in this study, then either a single contract department, several contract departments, or a County department will have to be managed.

## **Recommendation**

The logical Board of Commission Committee to provide oversight to fire protection is the Community and Emergency Services Committee since it currently reviews operations for the Emergency Services Division.

If a contract or contracts with existing departments and municipalities are used to implement fire services, then the contracts could be managed by the Emergency Services Director (ESD). The ESD currently manages the emergency medical services contract with Gold Cross.

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If the Board of Commissioners decide to create a County fire division instead of contracting with others, then a new Fire Services Division would have to be created. The new division could be part of the current Community and Emergency Services Committee along with the Community and Leisure Services and Emergency Services Divisions.

## Timelines

Both the compressed and expanded timelines outline major activities needed to implement a fire service with personnel and operational needs funded through a property tax and capital equipment and facilities funded through SPLOST funds. The list of activities provided is a general outline of major tasks. More study and more detailed schedules are needed if the decision is made to implement the recommendations in this study.

### Compressed

This schedule moves implementation of the property tax alternative for fire services as soon as possible. Decisions on current, consolidated, or a single fire service need to be made prior to setting the property tax millage rate in August. A phased system or transition from one type of service to another is also possible and may be needed based on the short time available for key decisions.

The compressed timeline starts property tax as early as 2003. A SPLOST referendum is called for in 2004 with collections beginning in 2006. Implementation of SPLOST projects could begin in October 2006 after sufficient funds have been collected. Any reduction in millage rate due to SPLOST funding for capital projects could occur partially in 2006 and fully in 2007.

Through use of a general obligation bond as part of the SPLOST referendum, capital funds could be available shortly after passage of the referendum in 2004.

### Expanded

The expanded timeline provides more time for study and deliberations of the alternatives associated with the study recommendations. It permits time to discuss issues thoroughly with fire departments, municipal leaders, and citizens.

The expanded time line would start property tax for fire service in either 2004 or 2005. The SPLOST referendum would be held in 2005 with collections beginning in 2006. SPLOST projects will be implemented as early as the later part of 2006. Any reduction in millage rate for capital projects funded by SPLOST could occur partially in 2006 and fully in 2007 and beyond.

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## TIMELINES

	ACTIVITIES	COMPRESSED TIMELINE		EXPANDED TIMELINE	
		Year	Month	Year	Month
<b>1</b>	<b>Fire Service Study Update</b>				
	1.1 Draft Report				
	1.1.1 Initiated	2003	Jan	2003	Jan
	1.1.2 Completed	2003	May	2003	May
	1.1.3 Presented	2003	May	2003	May
	1.1.4 Review Period	2003	May – Jun	2003	May – Jul
	1.2 Final Report				
	1.2.1 Comments Received	2003	Jun	2003	Aug
	1.2.2 Draft Report Revised	2003	Jul	2003	Oct
	1.2.3 Presented	2003	Jul - Aug	2003	Nov - Dec
	1.2.4 Meetings	2003	August	2003/04	Dec - Jan
<b>2</b>	<b>Decision by Board of Commissioners</b>				
	2.1 Recognition of Volunteer Subscription Fire Departments (Recommendation #1)				
	2.2.1 Permanent Monument to Fire Services Proposed	2003	Aug	2004	Jan
	2.2 Kind of Fire Department (Recommendation #2)				
	2.2.1 Existing	2003	Aug	2004	Jan – Mar
	2.2.2 Partial Consolidation	2003	Aug	2004	Jan – Mar
	2.2.3 Full Consolidation With Either Contract or County Department	2003	Aug	2004	Jan – Mar
	2.3 Organizational Structure (Recommendation #3)				
	2.3.1 Volunteer	2003	Aug	2004	Apr
	2.3.2 Career	2003	Aug	2004	Apr
	2.3.3 Combination	2003	Aug	2004	Apr
	2.4 Funding Source (Recommendations # 4 & 5)				
	2.4.1 Subscription for Operation	2003	Aug	2004	May
	2.4.2 Property Tax for Operation	2003	Aug	2004	May
	2.4.3 SPLOST for capital	2003	Aug	2004	May
	2.5 Legal Aspects of Fire Service (Recommendation #6)				
	2.5.1 Constitutional Authority	2003	Aug	2003/04	Sep – Mar
	2.5.2 Contracts for Fire Protection Service	2003	Aug	2003/04	Sep – Mar

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	2.5.3 Creation of Fire Protection Districts	2003	Aug	2003/04	Sep – Mar
	2.5.4 Property Tax	2003	Aug	2004/05	Aug
	2.5.5 SPLOST	2004	Apr	2005/06	Apr
	2.6 Use of Property Tax Funds (Recommendation #6)				
	2.6.1 Distribution by Fire Districts	2003	Aug	2004/05	Aug
	2.6.2 Distribution by Budget Requirements	2003	Aug	2004/05	Aug
	2.7 ISO Ratings				
	2.7.1 Request ISO class rating update	2003	Aug	2004/05	Aug
<b>3</b>	<b>Implementation</b>				
	3.1 Property Tax Alternative				
	3.1.1 Millage Rate	2003	Aug	2004 or 05	Aug
	3.1.2 Tax Collection	2003	Oct – Dec	2004 or 05	Oct – Dec
	3.2 Master Plan (Recommendation #7)				
	3.2.1 Develop Plan	2003	Sep	2004	Sept
	3.2.2 Complete Plan	2004	Mar	2005	Mar
	3.3 Training (Recommendation #8)				
	3.3.1 Program Developed	2003	Nov	2004	Nov
	3.3.2 Training Initiated	2004	Mar	2005	Mar
	3.4 Contracts (Recommendation #9)				
	3.4.1 Prepare contracts & MOUs	2003	Aug	2004	Aug
	3.4.2 Complete and Execute	2003	Nov	2004	Nov
	3.5 Operations (Recommendation #10)				
	3.5.1 Initiate	2004	Jan	2005/06	Jan
	3.5.2 Monitor	2004	Jan – Oct	2005/06	Jan – Oct
	3.5.3 Evaluate	2004	Nov - Dec	2005/06	Nov – Dec
	3.5.4 Modify	2005	Jan – Dec	2005/06	Jan – Dec
	3.6 SPLOST				
	3.6.1 Gather Information	2003	Sep – Jan	2004	Jun - Sep
	3.6.2 Hearings	2004	Jan – Mar	2004	Oct – Dec
	3.6.3 CIP Plan	2004	Apr	2005	Apr
	3.6.4 Referendum	2005	Jul	2005/06	July
	3.6.5 Collections	2006	Jan	2006	Jan
	3.6.6 Design	2006	Feb - Aug	2006	Feb - Aug
	3.6.7 Build	2006	Oct	2006	Oct
	3.6.8 Procure	2007	Jan	2006	Jan
	3.6.9 General Obligation Bond	2004	Sep	2005/06	Sep

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## Illustrated Example

This study presents a variety of alternatives for policy makers to consider. After reviewing the first draft of the study, Board of Commission (BOC) Chairman Ron Cross requested that a section be added outlining how the BOC could specifically implement the recommendations to use property tax for operations and Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) for capital requirements.

In response to that request, this portion of the study illustrates how the property tax and SPLOST could be used for fire protection services. Using the compressed timeline as a guide, more detail and specific dates are added to provide further direction for decision makers.

## Scenario

A scenario is an outline or model of a supposed or expected sequence of events. For purposes of this illustration, the following assumptions are made:

- The study findings and recommendations are generally accepted by County, municipal, and fire officials and citizens.
- Factors favoring positive action on implementing the use of property tax for fire operations and SPLOST for capital items include the following:
  - All Georgia counties with a population of more than 76,000 have a county fire service except Columbia County.
  - Current subscription collection rates of 50% to 89% do not provide adequate resources to improve fire protection services.
  - The cost of collecting subscriptions reduces the funds available for providing fire services.
  - Use of SPLOST funds would reduce capital improvement costs by 7% by eliminating state and local sales taxes.
  - Using property taxes instead of a subscription system is lower in cost to homeowners currently subscribing for fire services.
  - Property taxes are tax deductible on Federal income taxes if itemized deductions are taken. This further increases property owner savings.
  - A coordinated County-wide fire protection system improves essential life and property safety services.
  - Due to limited time and existing County staff capability, the use of a contract for services with existing fire services is the best alternative initially to provide fire protection in the County. Other options mentioned in this study (e.g., partial consolidation of some fire districts or the creation of a single fire service) need study and should be implemented as soon as possible to improve services and reduce costs.
  - Potential insurance premium savings through lower ISO ratings.

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In response to this scenario, the following sequence of events is proposed using the compressed timeline in this section of this study:

1. FIRE STUDY UPDATE		
	• Draft study presented at Community and Emergency Services (CES) Committee study.	May 12, 2003
	• Study is discussed at a Town Hall meeting.	May 22, 2003
	• Hearing on the study held at CES Committee meeting.	June 9, 2003
	• Deadline for receiving written comments on the draft study.	June 12, 2003
	• Final Report issued at the CES Committee meeting after reviewing comments received.	July 7, 2003
2. DECISION BY BOC		
	• Volunteer fire departments are recognized by County at CES Committee meeting and at BOC meeting.	July 7, 2003 July 15, 2003
	• Contracts are presented at CES Committee meeting for all existing fire departments for a period of one (1) year period beginning on January 1, 2004.	August 11, 2003
	• The option to fund fire operations through a property tax and capital fire requirements with SPLOST funds is presented at the CES Committee meeting.	August 11, 2003
	• A draft budget for each fire department is reviewed by the CES Committee. The budget provides funds to each department based on the property taxes collected from each fire district. A draft distribution proposal is shown on Illustration 6.A.	August 11, 2003
	• Meetings with ISO officials are scheduled to review current fire ratings and possible future improvements	August 2003
3. IMPLEMENTATION		
	• Millage rate for fire protection services proposed by CES Committee	August 11, 2003
	• Millage rate approved by BOC	August 19, 2003
	• Tax collection for 2004 fire service	Sep – Nov, 2003
	• Master Plan for Fire Services to include staffing, capital, training, and communication requirements - Initiated - Completed	September 2003 March 8, 2004
	• Contracts for fire protection services - Reviewed by departments and municipalities - Executed (this could be modified to meet fiscal year requirements of fire departments)	Sept – Oct, 2003 November 2003
	• Operations for fire services start date	January 1, 2004
	• SPLOST funding for fire protection capital requirements (e.g.,	

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	land, buildings, and equipment) reviewed along with all other County needs in Capital Improvements Plan - Initiated - Completed	July 1, 2003 March 9, 2004
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Referendum for SPLOST and bond issue to fund highest priority capital needs including fire equipment and facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Call for referendum</li> <li>Referendum</li> <li>Issue general obligation bonds</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	April 20, 2004 July 20, 2004 September 2004
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management of fire contracts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewed monthly</li> <li>Consolidation of districts evaluated</li> <li>Contract/s for 2005 drafted</li> <li>Contract/s for 2005 executed</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	2004 Sept – Oct 2004 November 2004 December 2004

Illustration 6.A shows the possible distribution of fire tax property revenues to the existing fire districts using a 2.00 mill fire tax. Note that \$1,017,084 is available for capital or other requirements over and above 2003 budget levels.

### PROPOSED DISTRIBUTION OF PROPERTY TAX FUNDS FOR 2004 CONTRACTS WITH FIRE DEPARTMENTS AND MUNICIPALITIES

**Illustration 6.A**

District	2.00 Mill Fire Tax	Maintain Existing Personnel and Operations Using 2003 Budget	Balance Available for Capital
Harlem	\$ 228,134	\$ 109,175*	\$ 118,959
Grovetown	\$ 555,953	\$ 145,179*	\$ 410,774
Appling	\$ 285,664	\$ 80,000	\$ 205,664
Leah	\$ 117,043	\$ 70,000	\$ 47,043
Winfield	\$ 61,993	\$ 16,000	\$ 45,993
Martinez	<u>\$3,710,651</u>	<u>\$3,522,000</u>	<u>\$ 188,651</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,959,438</b>	<b>\$3,942,354</b>	<b>\$1,017,084</b>

\*Estimate based on actual 2002 revenue

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Illustration 6.B shows the distribution of 2.00 mill property tax for fire services in districts that are partially consolidated. The advantage of partial consolidation is the better utilization of revenues and the reduction of overhead.

## COMPARISON OF TAX REVENUES TO CURRENT SUBSCRIPTION-BASED BUDGETS WITH PARTIAL CONSOLIDATION OF GROVETOWN – HARLEM AND APPLING – LEAH- WINFIELD DISTRICTS

**Illustration 6.B**

District	2.00 mill FireTax	Maintain Existing Personnel and Operation Using 2003 Budget	Balance Available for Capital and Other Requirements	Combined Increase for Harlem- Grovetown and Appling, Leah & Winfield
Harlem City County	\$228,134	44,175 <u>65,000</u> \$109,175 Est.	\$118,959	Harlem and Grovetown  \$529,733
Grovetown City County	\$555,953	34,701 <u>110,478</u> \$145,179 Est.	\$410,774	
Appling	\$285,664	\$80,000	\$205,664	Appling, Leah & Winfield  \$298,700
Leah	\$117,043	\$70,000	\$47,043	
Winfield	\$61,993	\$16,000 Est.	\$45,993	
Martinez-Evans	\$3,710,651	\$3,522,000	\$188,651	\$188,651
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,959,438</b>	<b>\$3,942,354</b>	<b>\$1,017,084</b>	<b>\$1,017,084</b>

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Through the use of SPLOST funds for capital, the millage rate could be reduced to approximately 1.62 mills. For all examples, more study is needed on establishing mill rates and capital budgets based on actual personnel, operating, and capital cost projections.

The percentage distribution formula for funds is taken from Illustration 5.C on page 5-3 based on the percentage of funds used by fire services with combination departments in comparable Georgia counties.

The use of property tax for personnel and operations in conjunction with SPLOST for capital offer the lowest cost alternative for property tax funding of fire services. Since the earliest capital funding of capital needs through SPLOST would be in September 2003 or County fiscal year 2004-05, implementation of this proposal would not take full effect until the second half of calendar year 2004. In the future, it would make sense to start operating fire service budgets in the County fiscal year of July 1 through June 30.

### **DISTRIBUTION OF FIRE TAX FUNDS UTILIZING A SINGLE DEPARTMENT SERVING THE ENTIRE COUNTY USING A 2.00 AND 1.62 PROPERTY TAX MILLAGE RATE**

**Illustration 6.C**

<b>Mill Rate or SPLOST</b>	<b>Potential Funds</b>	<b>Distribution Formula</b>			
		<b>Personnel 64%</b>	<b>Operations 17%</b>	<b>Capital 19%</b>	<b>Total 100%</b>
2.00 Mills – No SPLOST	\$4,959,438	\$3,174,040 (property tax)	\$843,105 (property tax)	\$942,293 (property tax)	<b>\$4,959,438</b>
1.62 Mills and SPLOST	\$4,959,438	\$3,174,040 (property tax)	\$843,105 (property tax)	\$1,040,259 (SPLOST)	<b>\$3,919,179</b> (property tax) <b>\$1,040,259</b> + (SPLOST) <b>\$4,959,438</b>

### **Conclusions**

The utilization of SPLOST for capital and the issuance of general obligation bonds as part of the proposed SPLOST referendum in July 2004 and the use of 1.62 mills in property tax for personnel and operations offers the best alternative for providing improved fire service at the least cost to property owners. The partial consolidation of fire districts offers advantages over the existing system of six fire districts through better use of resources and reduction in overhead. The single department offers the best solution to provide fire services in the County at the lowest cost to property tax payers.

## COMMENTS

Your comments and opinions are requested on any and all aspects of this “draft” fire study. Please use the first section for general comments and the second section for page-specific comments. If you wish to receive a response to your e-mail, then please include your name, address and e-mail address at the end of this comments section, and a response will forthcoming. Verbal comments can be received Monday through Friday 8 AM - 5 PM by calling 868-3375, and e-mails may also be sent to [information@co.columbia.ga.us](mailto:information@co.columbia.ga.us). Written responses may be mailed to the Emergency Services Division, P.O. Box 498, Evans, GA 30809 or faxed to 868-3343.

### GENERAL COMMENTS :

### SPECIFIC COMMENTS :

Page Number	Comment

If you wish a response to your comment/question or verification of the receipt of your comments, please complete the following:

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